

# **DANGEROUS WEAPONS:** **THE BENONI** **AND BENKO**

**DAZZLE YOUR OPPONENTS!**



**RICHARD PALLISER**

**JOHN EMMS**

**CHRIS WARD**

**GAWAIN JONES**

**EVERYMANCHESS**

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# Preface

One might consider both the Modern Benoni and the Benko Gambit to be dangerous weapons in their own right. That's true to an extent, but even these lively counter-attacking openings have built up a certain body of theory in their main lines. However, a significant amount of fertile territory still exists after both of Black's main replies to 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5.

In keeping with the *Dangerous Weapons* ethos, the reader will find in this work a number of ways for both White and Black to surprise the opponent. Benko players should certainly appreciate the ideas (chapters 10, 12 and 13) of one of the opening's leading exponents, Gawain Jones. Meanwhile I'm pleased to say that I managed to persuade John Emms to change sides against one of his favourite openings, resulting in two tricky and quite dangerous anti-Modern Benoni weapons for White (chapters 1 and 5). This book is not just restricted to the Modern Benoni and Benko, though; both Chris Ward (who contributed chapters 4, 8 and 9) and I have enjoyed researching some rather aggressive systems for White against the likes of the Czech Benoni and the Snake Benoni, while those playing Black can equip themselves with weapons in both the real and 'pseudo' Blumenfeld gambits.

All of the authors really enjoyed analysing the lines which they propose here, and are looking forward to employing them in their own games. I hope that readers will also enjoy getting to grips with the many dangerous lines featured here, before springing them on unsuspecting opponents!

Richard Palliser,  
York,  
May 2008

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# Series Introduction

The original concept behind *Dangerous Weapons* was to take a major chess opening and to approach it in a completely different way: to concentrate on variations that are ambitious, sharp, innovative, disruptive, tricky, enjoyable to analyse; ones not already weighed down by mountains of theory, and ones unfairly ignored or discredited. To me this seemed like an author's paradise, which I'm sure contributed somewhat towards the inspiration behind this series!

The main motivation behind studying major openings in such a way is to be able to present the reader (not forgetting the author!) with a considerable number of fresh, hard-hitting opening weapons for both White and Black; in some cases to create repertoires and in others to enhance and rejuvenate existing ones.

## What is a Dangerous Weapon?

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For the purpose of choosing opening variations for this series, usually a *Dangerous Weapon* fits into one or more of these overlapping categories:

**1) Moves that create complex, original positions full of razor-sharp tactics and rich positional ideas where creative, attacking play is rewarded; moves which are new, rare or very fresh, leaving plenty of scope for research.**

It should be pointed out that even though mainline theory produces a vast number of wonderfully complicated positions, these opening variations lose out heavily in the 'danger' stakes. No matter how sharp and difficult the position, the opening phase is nowhere near as hazardous for your opponent if he is able to fall back on that comfort blanket known as theory. I've played plenty of incredibly sharp lines without any real fear simply because of reasonable book knowledge and some solid home preparation. Thus in *Dangerous Weapons* the emphasis has mainly been on non-theoretical lines, where your opponent is left to his own devices at a very early stage.

**2) Moves that are highly ambitious; ones which aim for total domination.**

Perfect for those not satisfied with a quiet theoretical edge as White and eager to search for a big advantage or even a direct refutation, albeit at some risk; or for those as Black who prefer to strive for the initiative at any cost, preferring this over a manageable disadvantage or sterile equality.

**3) Moves that have been previously ignored, discarded or discredited by theory, perhaps unfairly so or maybe for the wrong reasons.**

Discredited lines can be especially dangerous – the psychological element cannot be ignored. Facing an opening like this, I find myself asking the question, ‘Why is he playing this variation if it is meant to be bad?’ Often there is a very good reason (a logical improvement, perhaps, which overturns a previous assessment), and in any case how are you supposed to remember a hypothetical 15-move refutation when you only browsed it in a book once, and that was a few years ago?

**4) Moves that are visually shocking; moves which seem to contradict the laws of the game.**

Disregarding the question of objective merit for the moment, there’s no doubt that a crazy-looking move has at the very least some psychological value. Unleashed on an opponent, it can produce a range of emotions: uncontrolled laughter, perhaps followed by over-confidence; anger (at being insulted by such a move) followed by over-aggression; or perhaps discomfort, followed by timidity. Of course you may instead encounter understanding followed by objectivity – you have to pick and choose your opponents.

## **Dangerous for Whom?**

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It would be difficult, probably impossible, to guarantee that every single variation in this book is 100% sound. You have to understand that in some cases ‘dangerous’ can mean ‘dangerous for both sides’. What I do expect, however, is that your opponent’s ride throughout the opening should be far bumpier than yours!

## **Guiding You Through**

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Throughout the book there are various icons together with explanatory notes to emphasize significant points. They should be fairly self-explanatory, but here’s a brief summary:



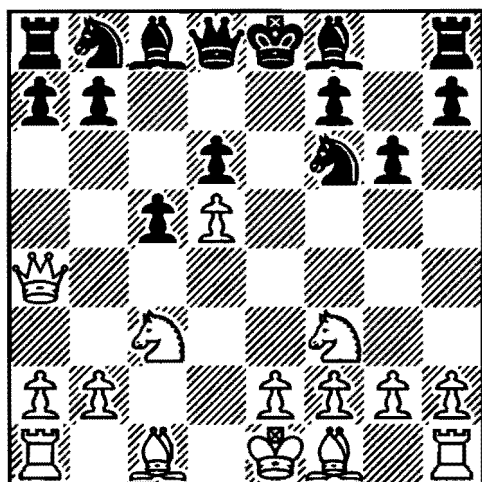
**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** This signifies a game, variation, sub-variation or position where the Dangerous Weapon has obviously produced the desired effect.

## Chapter One

---

# A Troublesome Check

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 Qa4+!?**  
(Diagram 1)



**Diagram 1 (B)**

If you are looking for an unusual, non-theoretical weapon against the Modern Benoni, there's a good argument for 7 Qa4+. It's true that this checking idea is in general well known in the Modern Benoni (for example, 7 Bf4 Bg7 8 Qa4+! is a

main line), but it's rare to see it played as early as move seven.

What are the attractions of 7 Qa4+? Let's look at practical considerations first. Given that it is played so infrequently, it has every chance of surprising your opponent, who is probably prepared for 7 e4, 7 Bf4, 7 Nd2, 7 g3, and maybe even 7 Bg5 and 7 h3 – all of these moves are at least ten times more popular than 7 Qa4+! Another factor is that Black cannot simply shrug off the surprise and carry on developing; he must make an immediate decision over how to deal with the check. There are four possible blocks on d7, two of which are more logical than the others, and there's every chance of gaining time on the clock while your opponent stewes over the relative merits of each response.

So much for surprise and confusion, but what does 7 Qa4+ actually achieve? Well, the main positional idea behind 7 Qa4+ is to induce a black piece to d7 – usually a bishop or a knight – thereby denying the perennially weak d6-pawn the protection of its queen from d8. White usually follows up with Bf4, after which Black has to solve the problem of how to develop the Benoni bishop without allowing the d6-pawn to drop. Indeed, there are many similarities between 7 Qa4+ and the much more common 7 Bf4. There are even one or two direct transpositions, and I've tried to point out where these exist.

Though uncommon, 7 Qa4+ has been used by a number of strong players. The following two games, which demonstrate how well it can work in practical play, feature the well-known grandmasters Predrag Nikolic and Zurab Azmaiparashvili on the white side.

---

□ **P.Nikolic** ■ **B.Tindall**

Gold Coast 2000

---

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 Qa4+!?**

When such a regarded theoretician as Predrag Nikolic plays something new, you have to sit up and take notice. Nikolic has specialized in making Black's life difficult in the Fianchetto Variation, but in this game he opts for something more direct.

**7...Qd7?! (Diagram 2)**

Undoubtedly surprised by the check, Black reacts poorly. If White were to simply exchange queens on d7, everything would be okay for Black, but clearly that is not the intention!

**8 Qh4**

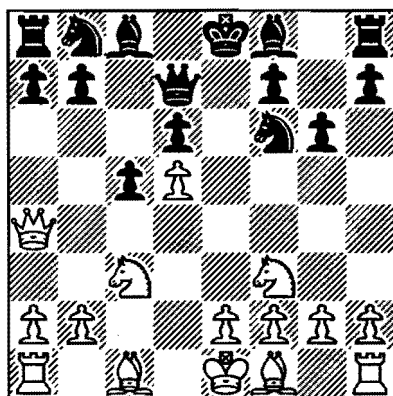
The queen swings over to the kingside and attacks the black knight. Suddenly Black is a little bit embarrassed on the dark squares and his queen looks misplaced on d7.



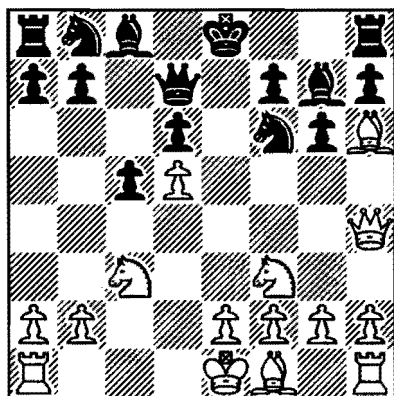
**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** White has another enticing option in 8 Nb5!, and this might be even stronger than 8 Qh4.

The obvious threat after 8 Nb5 is 9 Nc7+. It looks like Black must deal with this by playing 8...Nxd5, since 8...Na6 9 e4 leaves Black struggling badly, especially as one of White's threats is 10 Nxd6+! Bxd6 11 Bb5, while after 8...Kd8 9 Bg5 Be7 White can even consider 10 Ne5!? dxe5 11 d6. Even so, 8...Nxd5 9 e4 Nb4! (9...Nb6 10 Nc7+) 10 Bf4! (10 Nc7+? Kd8 11 Qxd7+ Bxd7 12 Nxa8 Nc2+ was Black's idea) certainly leaves White with the advantage after, for example, 10...N8c6 11 0-0-0!.

**8...Bg7 9 Bh6! (Diagram 3)**



**Diagram 2 (W)**



**Diagram 3 (B)**

Modern Benoni players are never enthusiastic about having to part with their Benoni bishop at such an early stage. At one fell swoop, Black's dark squares on the kingside are weakened and his potential for counterplay is reduced.

**9...0-0 10 Bxg7 Kxg7 11 e4 Qe7 12 Bd3 b6**

Planning ...Ba6 to exchange the light-squared bishops. It's generally accepted that finding a role for the c8-bishop is one of Black's greatest challenges in the Modern Benoni, and trading it is usually considered to be a success.

Note that White answers 12...Bg4 with 13 Nd2!, preventing Black from carrying out his desired exchange. Then 13...Nbd7 planning ...Ne5 looks like Black's best response, but White keeps some advantage after 14 f3 Ne5 15 Be2 Bd7 16 f4 Neg4 17 Bxg4 Bxg4 18 0-0.

**13 0-0 Ba6 14 Bxa6 Nxa6 15 Rfe1 (Diagram 4)**





**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** White has a small but distinct advantage. Personally I don't really fancy Black's position, especially since counterplay will be very hard to come by. Meanwhile White still has that extra central pawn and an easy plan of centralization followed by pushing through e4-e5.

Here Black should probably hunker down with 15...Rfe8 16 Rad1 Rad8. The move chosen in the game certainly doesn't help his cause.

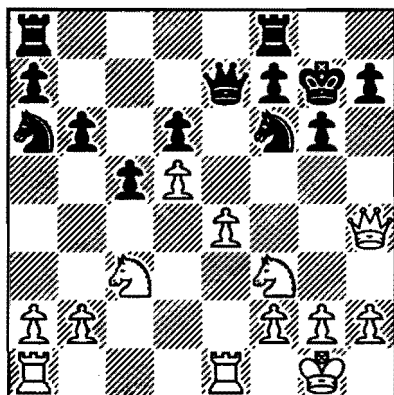
**15...Nb4?**

Threatening 16...Nc2, but the a1-rook was coming to d1 in any case and Black just winds up losing valuable time...

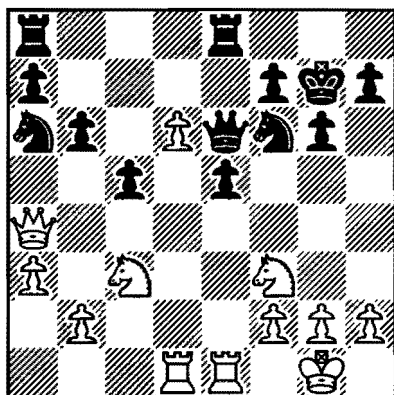
**16 Rad1! Rfe8 17 a3 Na6 18 e5!**

...which Nikolic exploits in the most thematic way. Tindall is simply not ready to deal with this advance and his position soon deteriorates.

**18...dxe5 19 d6 Qe6 20 Qa4! (Diagram 5)**



**Diagram 4 (B)**



**Diagram 5 (B)**

Now the poor knight has no choice other than an ignominious retreat to its starting square, and White will win material by force.

20 d7! was also very strong after 20...Red8 21 Nxe5, or 20...Nxd7? 21 Ng5 Qf5 22 Qxh7+ Kf8 23 Nd5 and White is mating with Qh8.

**20...Nb8 21 Rxe5 Qd7 22 Rxe8 Nxe8 23 Qe4! Nc6 24 Ne5!**

Winning the exchange.

**24...Nxe5 25 Qxa8 Nc6**

This loses immediately, as does 25...Nxd6 26 Qd5 Nec4 27 Qxc4.

**26 Qxc6! 1-0**

26...Qxc6 27 d7 followed by d8Q will leave White a rook ahead.

Powerful play from Nikolic, but Black doesn't have to block the check with his queen.

□ Z.Azmaiparashvili ■ A.Zubarev

European Club Cup, Pula 1999

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 Qa4+ Nbd7 (Diagram 6)

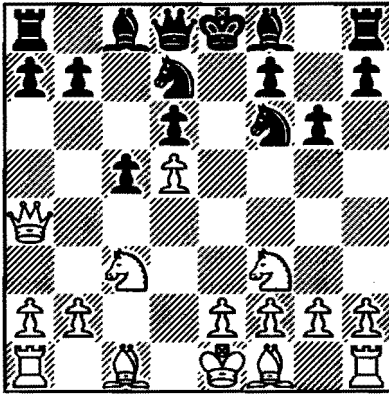


Diagram 6 (W)

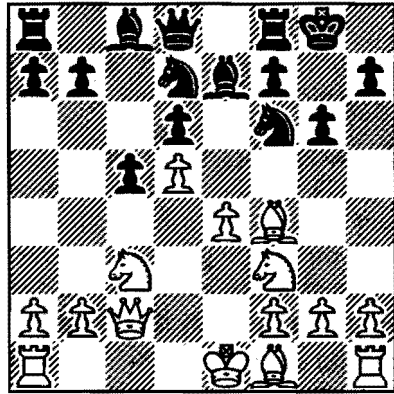


Diagram 7 (B)

This and 7...Bd7 have been Black's most common choices when faced with 7 Qa4+.

**8 Bf4!**

White must utilize the main benefit of playing Qa4+ (Black's queen no longer defends d6) as soon as possible, in order to force Black to solve the problem of developing his Benoni bishop while keeping the weak d6-pawn protected. Thus 8 e4 Bg7 and only then 9 Bf4 allows Black to escape unharmed with 9...0-0!; the point being that 10 Bxd6?? loses to 10...Nb6!. White can instead play 10 Bd3, but then 10...Nh5! looks okay for Black because the d-pawn is still poisoned.

**8...Be7**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Black has solved the problem of the d6-pawn, but at a price. That he has forgone the active development of his Benoni bishop in favour of the passive e7-square has to be considered a success for White.

Black has generally preferred 8...a6, which will be covered, along with the alterna-

tives, in the Looking a Little Deeper section, below.

## 9 e4 0-0 10 Qc2! (Diagram 7)

The queen has performed her task and now retreats to a safer square, on which she won't run into Black's counterplay on the queenside with ...a6 and ...b5.



**BEWARE!** In the game H.Pilaj-F.Janz, Austrian League 2002, White didn't take this possibility of counterplay seriously enough, and following 10 h3?! a6! 11 Be2 Rb8 12 0-0 b5 13 Qc2 Re8 14 a4? (White should counter with the typical 14 a3! Bf8 15 b4!, when he can still fight for the advantage) 14...b4 15 Nd1 Bf8! 16 Bd3 b3! 17 Qd2 Nxe4 Black was in control.

## 10...Ne8

Black attempts to regroup with ...Bf6, moving the bishop to its favoured diagonal. 10...Nh5 11 Be3 Bf6 would be a more active way to achieve the same thing. In *Informant* 77 Azmaiparashvili offers the line 12 Be2 Bg7 13 Nd2 (13 0-0 is also possible, and this might give Black fewer options) 13...Nhf6 (maybe 13...Ne5!?, Black has to do something active or else he runs the risk of being squashed) 14 0-0 Ne5 15 h3, with a clear advantage for White in view of the imminent f2-f4.

## 11 Bd3 Bf6 12 0-0 Ne5

If Black wishes to avoid the following structural change he can play 12...Qe7, although there's no doubt that after, for example, 13 Qd2 White enjoys a pleasant position reminiscent of those he often achieves in the Modern Main Line.

## 13 Nxe5 Bxe5 14 Bxe5 dxe5 (Diagram 8)

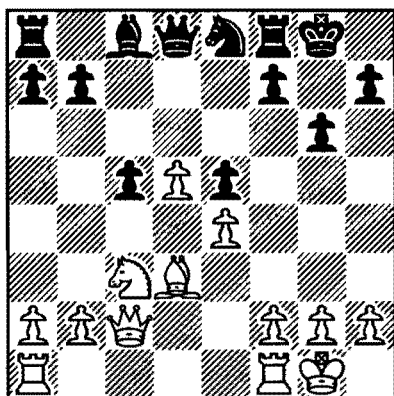


Diagram 8 (W)

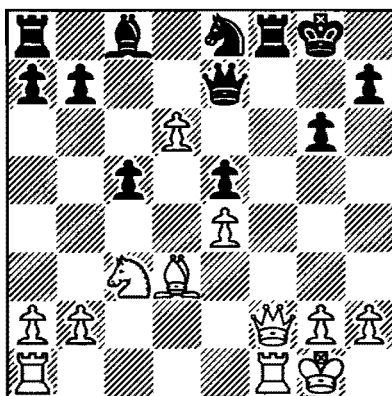


Diagram 9 (B)

If White plays quietly Black will get organized with ...Nd6, ...Qe7, ...b6, etc with a super-solid position – the blockading knight on d6 is a particularly effective piece in these situations. So Azmaiparashvili plays dynamically, continuing to set Black fresh problems.

### 15 f4! Qe7

15...exf4 can even be met by 16 e5!?, although simply recapturing on f4 is a good option.

### 16 Qf2!

Preventing ...Nd6 for the moment, as this would leave c5 en prise.

### 16...f6 17 fxe5 fxe5 18 d6!! (Diagram 9)

An excellent pawn sacrifice, clearing the c4-g8 diagonal for the bishop and the d5-square for the knight, while ensuring that Black has no safe haven for his knight on d6. Instead 18 Qe3 Rxf1+ 19 Rxf1 looks superficially good for White, but Black continues with 19...Bd7, planning 20...b6 followed by 21...Nd6, when it's not that easy to break through his defences.

### 18...Qxd6

Instead 18...Rxf2? 19 dxe7 is virtually winning for White, such as after 19...Rxf1+ 20 Rxf1 Bd7 21 Bb5! Bxb5 22 Rf8+ Kg7 23 Nxb5 Rc8 24 Nd6!.

18...Nxd6 is not as bad, but 19 Qxc5 b6 20 Qd5+ Be6 21 Qxe5 (Azmaiparashvili) leaves White a clear pawn ahead.

### 19 Bc4+ Kg7 20 Qxf8+ Qxf8 21 Rxf8 Kxf8 22 Rf1+ (Diagram 10)

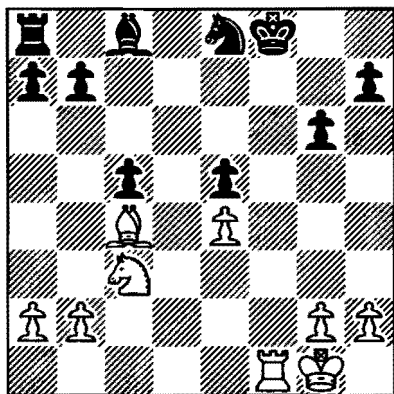


Diagram 10 (B)

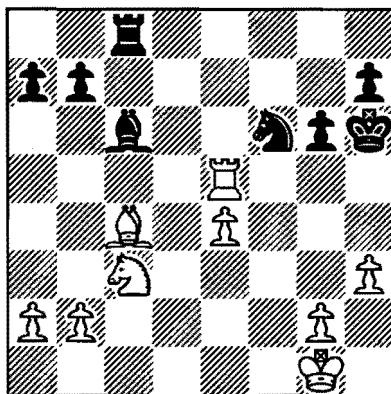


Diagram 11 (B)

The queens have disappeared, but White's initiative shows no sign of waning.

### 22...Kg7

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Running the other way causes Black to lose both his kingside pawns after 22...Ke7 23 Rf7+ Kd6 24 Rxh7 Nf6 25 Rg7.

**23 Rf7+ Kh6 24 Re7 Nf6**

24...Nd6 25 Bd5! keeps Black totally tied up – what's he going to do with his problem bishop? Azmaiparashvili adds the line 25...Rb8 26 Rxe5 b5 27 Re7 b4 28 Na4 c4 29 e5 Nf5 30 Re8 when it's difficult to see how Black can hope to survive.

**25 Rxe5 Bd7**

If Black tries to save his c-pawn with 25...b6, then 26 Re7 followed by e4-e5 looks very strong. After the text move Black manages to coordinate his pieces to some extent, but the damage has already been done.

**26 Rxc5 Bc6 27 Re5 Rc8 28 h3! (Diagram 11)**

There's nothing particularly wrong with 28 Bd5, but 28 h3 is the most accurate. White plans g2-g4 and demonstrates that the threat to e4 is not real.

**28...Bxe4?**

28...Re8 is more resilient, although I suspect that Black is fighting a losing battle after 29 Rxe8 Nxe8 30 Kf2.

**29 g4!**

Winning a piece. 29 Be6! also wins after 29...Re8 30 Nxe4 Nd7 31 Nd6!, but 29 Nxe4? Nd7! would keep Black in the game.

**29...Rxc4**

29...Bf5 30 Be2 wins, as does 29...Kg7 30 Re7+ Kf8 31 Rf7+ Ke8 32 Rxf6 Rxc4 33 Re6+.

**30 g5+ Kg7 31 gxf6+ Kxf6 32 Rxe4**

The rest is easy.

**32...Rxe4 33 Nxe4+ Ke5 34 Ng5 h5 35 Kf2 Kf5 36 Nf7 Ke4 37 Nd6+ Kd3 38 Nxb7 g5 39 Na5 Kc2 40 b4 Kc3 41 Nc6 Kc4 42 a3 a6 43 Nb8 Kb5 44 Nxa6! 1-0**

Not the only move, but 44...Kxa6 45 Ke3 Kb5 46 Ke4 followed by Kf5 is certainly good enough.

## Looking a Little Deeper

---

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5**

One practical advantage of 7 Qa4+ is that it's playable against virtually all the Modern Benoni move orders: White isn't hampered by early Nf3 issues, as this move is part of his system in any case. For example, 2...e6 3 Nf3 c5 (a popular move order for Nimzo/Benoni specialists) 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 and now:

a) The normal continuation is 5...d6 6 Nc3 g6, when 7 Qa4+ reaches our starting position.

b) Black *can* avoid our variation by adopting the little-played sequence 5...g6 6 Nc3 Bg7, holding back the d-pawn. Certainly there is no longer Qa4+ to deal with, but many black players would probably find that the drawbacks of this move order outweigh the positives, at least from a repertoire point of view. For example, after 7 e4 Black can no longer force the early ...d6, ...a6 and ...Bg4 lines, as following 7...d6 White can choose 8 h3 reaching the Modern Main Line. Furthermore, White can try to punish Black for his 'sin' of avoiding ...d6 by occupying the square himself. Indeed, 7 d6!? (**Diagram 12**), should certainly suit a *Dangerous Weapons* player. Here are two options after 7...0-0:

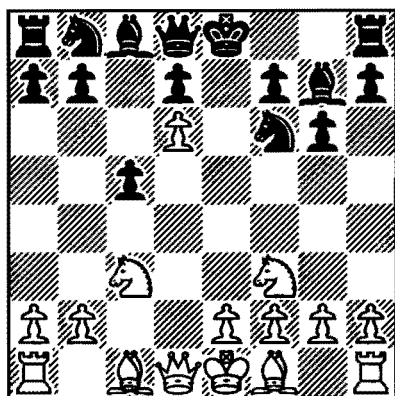


Diagram 12 (B)

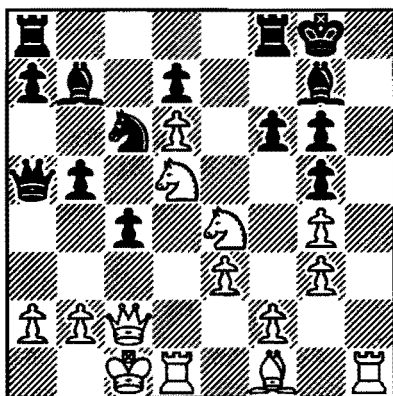


Diagram 13 (W)

b1) 8 e4 Nc6 (8...Re8 9 Bc4 b5 – 9...Nxe4 10 Bxf7+! – 10 Bd5 Nc6 11 0-0 b4 12 Nb5 Ba6 13 Nc7 Bxf1 14 Kxf1 Rc8 15 Bxc6 dxc6 16 Nxe8 Qxe8 17 e5 Nd5 was unclear in R.Vaganian-M.Suba, Kecskemet 1979) 9 Bc4 b5! 10 Nxb5 Nxe4 11 0-0 Bb7 12 Re1 Nd4 (Alburt gives 12...Ne5 13 Nxe5 Bxe5 14 Bd5 Bxh2+ 15 Kf1 with compensation for the pawn) 13 Nbx d4 cxd4 14 Bf4 and White was better in L.Alburt-S.Kudrin, US Championship, Berkeley 1984.

b2) 8 Bf4!? is also interesting, and an early Krasenkow game is worth noting here: 8...Nc6 9 e3 Qa5 10 Nd2 Nh5 11 Bg5 h6 12 g4! Ng3?! 13 hxg3 hxg5 14 Qc2 b5 15 Nb3 Qb4 16 0-0-0 c4 17 Nd2 Bb7 18 Nd5 Qa5 19 Ne4! f6 (**Diagram 13**) 20 Bxc4! bxc4 21 Qxc4 Rf7 22 Nexf6+ Kf8 23 Nh7+ Ke8 24 Nc7+ and Black resigned in M.Krasenkow-V.Ruban, Kaliningrad 1986.

### 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6

6...a6 avoids the check, but is very rarely played. The reason is that after 7 a4 (7 Qa4+? b5! 8 Nxb5? loses to 8...Bd7 9 e4 Qb6) 7...g6 8 Nd2!, the early inclusion of ...a6 and a2-a4 means that Black must commit to a line he might not usually play: a theoretically dubious variation of the Classical after 8...Nbd7 9 e4 Bg7 10 Be2 0-0

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

11 0-0, or an unfavourable version of the Knight's Tour Variation after 8...Bg7 9 Nc4! 0-0 10 Bf4 Ne8 11 Qd2.

### 7 Qa4+

Now Black's main two options are:

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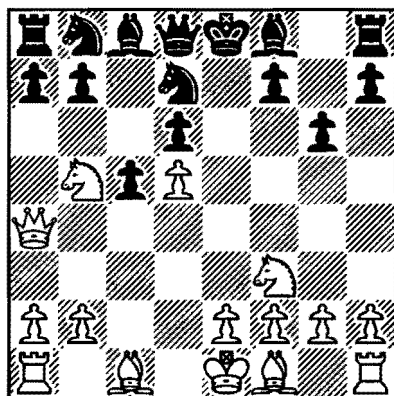
**A: 7...Bd7**

**B: 7...Nbd7**

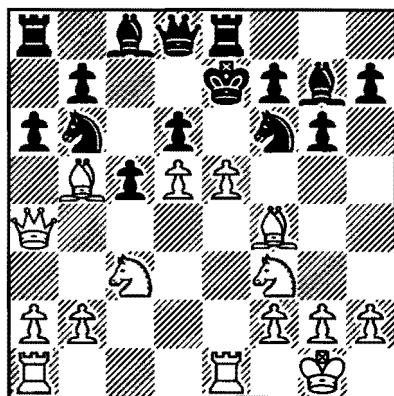
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Instead the dubious 7...Qd7?! was covered in Nikolic-Tindall and the remaining alternatives look even worse:

a) I can't find a single example of 7...Nfd7, and I'm not really surprised because it does clog up Black's entire queenside for no good reason. Anything should be sufficient for an advantage, but the direct 8 Nb5 (**Diagram 14**) looks especially promising after all of 8...Be7 9 Bh6! a6 10 e4 Bf8 11 Bf4!?, 8...a6? 9 Qe4+ Be7 10 Nxd6+, and finally 8...f6 (probably best) 9 h4!?, intending 9...Kf7 10 Qf4 Ne5 11 h5.



**Diagram 14 (B)**



**Diagram 15 (B)**

b) 7...Ke7?! certainly does its best to totally justify 7 Qa4+, and after 8 e4 Bg7 9 Bf4 Black is already in some trouble. V.Korchnoi-L.Ljubojevic, European Team Championship, Bath 1973, which arrived at this position via the move order 6 e4 d6 7 Bf4 Bg7 8 Qa4+ Ke7 9 Nf3, continued 9...Re8 10 Bb5! Nbd7 11 0-0 a6 12 Rfe1 Nb6 (or 12...Nh5 13 e5!) and now:

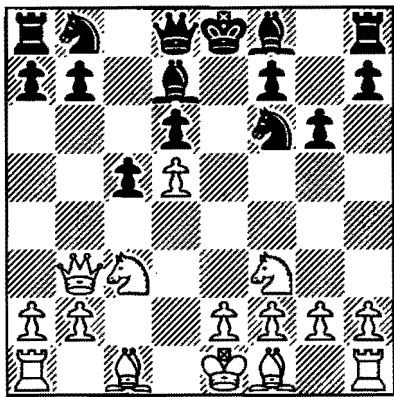
b1) Tal's suggestion of 13 Qb3!? axb5 14 Nxb5 looks promising after 14...Kf8 15 Bxd6+ Kg8 16 Bc7.

b2) So too was the game, in which White achieved a clear advantage after 13 e5!

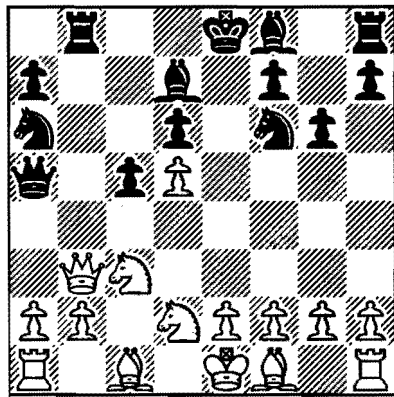


**(Diagram 15)** 13...dxe5 14 Qa3! Kf8 15 Bxe8 exf4 16 Qxc5+ Kg8 17 Ba4 Nxa4 18 Nxa4 Nxd5 19 Rad1. Note that Black avoided 13...Nxa4? because of the beautiful variation 14 exf6+ Kxf6 15 Bg5+ Kf5 16 Rxe8 Qa5 17 Rxc8? Rxc8? 18 Bd7 mate (Tal). Black can be a spoilsport in this line with 17...axb5!, but a move earlier 17 Re4! sets up a forced mate with either Rf4 or g2-g4.

**A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 Qa4+ Bd7 8 Qb3 (Diagram 16)**



**Diagram 16 (B)**



**Diagram 17 (W)**

This is definitely the most logical retreat for the queen. With the bishop induced to the d7-square, Black faces issues over his d6-pawn and the immediate attack on b7.

8 Qh4!? is possible, but much less favourable than the analogous idea in Nikolic-Tindall. Indeed, Black seems to obtain enough counterplay, such as after 8...Bg7 9 Bh6 0-0 10 Bxg7 Kxg7 11 e4 (11 e3!?) 11...Re8 12 Bd3 (or 12 Nd2 Na6!) 12...b5!.

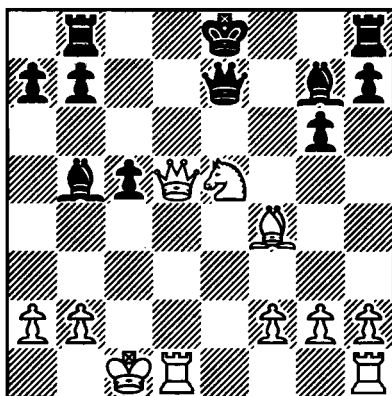
### **8...Qc7**

This has been Black's most common choice, but alternatives have been tried:

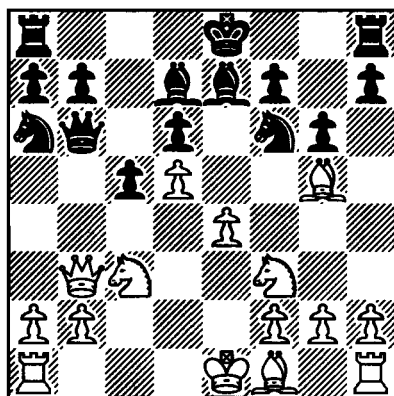
a) 8...b5?! is an unsound pawn sacrifice: 9 Nxb5 Qa5+ 10 Nc3 (10 Qc3 looks even cleaner) 10...Na6 11 Nd2! Rb8 (**Diagram 17**) 12 Nc4! Rxb3 (or 12...Qc7 13 Qd1 Bg7 14 Bf4!) 13 Nxa5 Rb8 14 a3 Nc7 15 e4 Bg7 16 Nc4 0-0 17 Nxd6 (why not?) 17...Ng4 18 h3 Ne5 19 f4 and White converted his advantage in V.Bukal-A.Rotstein, Porto San Giorgio 2002.

b) 8...Na6 9 e4! (this time it's a good pawn offer: 9 Qxb7?! Nb4! promises Black dangerous compensation) 9...Rb8 (or 9...Bg7 10 Bf4 0-0 11 Bxd6 Re8 12 e5 Ng4 13 Bxa6 bxa6 14 0-0 Nxe5 15 Nxe5 Bxe5 16 Bxe5 Rxe5 17 Rfe1 with advantage due to

the passed d-pawn and Black's weaknesses) 10 e5 (10 Bb5!? also led to success for White after 10...Nc7 11 0-0 Bg7 – or 11...Nxb5 12 Nxb5 Qb6 13 Nc3 Qxb3 14 axb3 a6 15 e5 – 12 e5 dxe5 13 Bxd7+ Nxd7 14 Bg5 Nf6 15 Qa4+ Qd7 16 Qxa7 0-0 17 Bxf6 Bxf6 18 Qxc5 in Z.Peng-L.Van Beek, Dutch League 2003) 10...dxe5 11 Nxe5 Bg7?! (11...Bd6 is best, but White keeps an edge after 12 Nxd7 Nxd7 13 Be2 0-0 14 0-0) 12 Bf4 Nc7 13 Nxf7! Qe7+ (and not 13...Kxf7? 14 Bxc7 Qxc7 15 d6+) 14 Ne5 (tempting, but 14 Be2! is objectively even stronger) 14...Nfxd5 15 Nxd5 Nxd5 16 Qxd5 Bc6 17 Bb5! Bxb5 18 0-0-0 (**Diagram 18**) and Black could not withstand White's attack in F.Levin-W.Pajeken, Hamburg 2003. The game concluded 18...Qf6 19 Rhe1 Qxf4+ 20 Kb1 Bxe5 21 Rxe5+ Kf8 22 Qd6+ Kg7 23 Re7+ Qf7 24 Qe5+ Kf8 25 Rxf7+ Kxf7 26 Qc7+ 1-0.



**Diagram 18 (B)**



**Diagram 19 (W)**

c) 8...Qb6!? 9 e4! (9 Qxb6 axb6 10 e4 Na6! offers Black counterplay) 9...Na6 (after 9...Qxb3 10 axb3 it's White who can use the a-file, and 10...Be7 11 Bh6 Ng4 12 Bf4 0-0 13 h3 Nf6 14 Bd3 Nh5 15 Bh2 f5 16 e5 dxe5 17 Bxe5, as given by Azmaiparashvili, promises White an edge) 10 Bg5 Be7 (**Diagram 19**) 11 Qc2 (11 e5!? dxe5 12 d6!, intending 12...Qxd6 13 Qxb7, also looks worth investigating) 11...0-0 12 Be2 Rfe8 13 0-0 was seen in V.Bukal-D.Cordi, Cutro 2005. Superficially Black appears to be in an advanced state of development, but some of his pieces are in strange positions and Bukal maintained the advantage after 13...Kg7 14 Qc1 Ng8 15 Bf4.

## 9 e4 Bg7

Now we reach a position which can also come about via the move order 7 e4 Bg7 8 Qa4+ Bd7 9 Qb3 Qc7.

An alternative is 9...a6 when White could reply with the automatic 10 a4. However, I think that 10 Bf4!? might be even stronger, especially after 10...Bg7 (10...Nh5 is safer) on account of 11 e5! (but not 11 Bxd6? Qxd6 12 Qxb7 0-0 13 e5

Bc8!! 14 Qxa8 Qb6!, which favoured Black in V.Korchnoi-M.Suba, Beersheva 1984) 11...dxe5 (or 11...Nh5 12 exd6 Qc8 13 Be3 0-0 14 a4 Bg4 15 Be2 with a clear plus for White, J.Fedorowicz-R.Hardarson, Reykjavik 1986) 12 Bxe5 Qc8 13 Ne4! (**Diagram 20**) 13...Nxe4 14 Bxg7 Rg8 15 Bh6 Qc7 16 Bd3 Nd6 17 0-0 and Black's position was a complete mess in J.Fedorowicz-J.Seret, Cannes 1987.

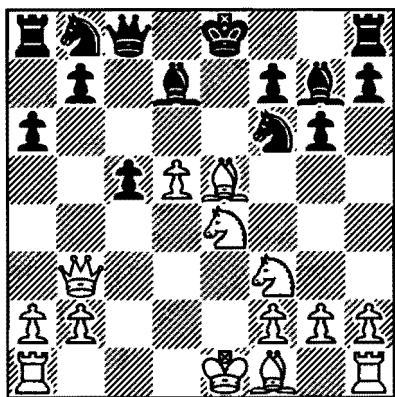


Diagram 20 (B)

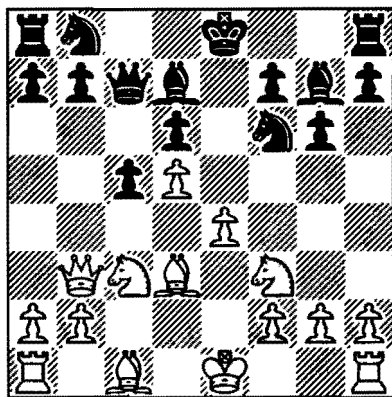


Diagram 21 (B)



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** Note that these examples arose via the move order 7 Bf4 a6 8 e4 Bg7 9 Qa4+ Bd7 10 Qb3 Qc7?!. Against 7 Qa4+ Black must be wary of stumbling into inferior lines by transposition.

10 Bd3!? (Diagram 21)



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** 10 Bf4 reaches one of the main lines of the Modern Benoni: 7 Bf4 Bg7 8 Qa4+ Bd7 9 Qb3 Qc7 10 e4. White players who have this line in their repertoire could consider 7 Qa4+ as a way to escape Black's deviations from that sequence, especially the theoretically recommended 7 Bf4 a6!.

However, in this case there is an argument for delaying or even omitting Bf4, especially since Black now has d6 covered so it doesn't come with tempo. Of the alternatives, 10 Bd3 is the one I favour the most. After 10 Bd3 White will often return to a development scheme similar to the one seen in the Modern Main Line.

Instead 10 h3, preventing ...Bg4, is unnecessarily time-consuming: 10...0-0 11 Be2 (11 Bd3!?) 11...Re8! 12 Nd2 Na6! (12...Bh6 13 0-0! a6 14 a4 Bxd2 15 Bxd2 Nxe4 16 Nxe4 Rxe4 17 Qf3 gave White strong pressure for the pawn in J.Liew Chee Meng-W.Charpentier, Dubai Olympiad 1986; incidentally this was the earliest game I

could find with 7 Qa4+) 13 0-0 Rab8 14 Re1 b5!, a line suggested by John Watson in his excellent book *The Gambit Guide to the Modern Benoni*, illustrates well how Black's counterplay can arrive with force if White is not careful.

Watson doesn't consider the possibility of 10 Bd3, but in my opinion it's time for White to finish development as quickly as possible.

### 10...0-0 11 0-0 Na6

With White's queen on b3, he need not be scared of ...Bg4 ideas because the knight can simply side-step the threat to trade: for example, 11...a6 12 a4 Bg4 13 Nd2! Nbd7!? 14 Nc4! Ne5 (otherwise the bishop is trapped with f2-f3) 15 Nxe5 dxe5 and White has a definite structural advantage.

An attempt to exploit White's set-up is 11...Rc8, threatening to win a piece with ...c4. Now 12 Nd2 Na6 13 Re1 Rab8 14 Bb5 (14 Nb5!?) 14...Nb4 (14...c4!?) 15 a3?! (15 Nc4) 15...Nc6! 16 Qd1 Nd4 favoured Black in A.Zubarev-M.Simantsev, Kharkov 1999. White clearly has some improvements in that line, but it seems to me that instead of 12 Nd2, White should try to eliminate ...c4 ideas completely by playing 12 Bc4!? (**Diagram 22**), hoping to take advantage of Black's strangely placed pieces. One possible variation that shows how this strategy can succeed is 12...Na6 13 Re1 Rab8 (13...Ng4!?) 14 e5! (just in time, and very strong) 14...dxe5 (or 14...Nh5 15 e6!) 15 Nxe5 b5 16 d6! Qxd6 17 Bxf7+ Kh8, when both 18 Bf4 c4 19 Qd1 and 18 Bxg6!? Be6 19 Qxe6! Qxe6 20 Nf7+ look good for White.

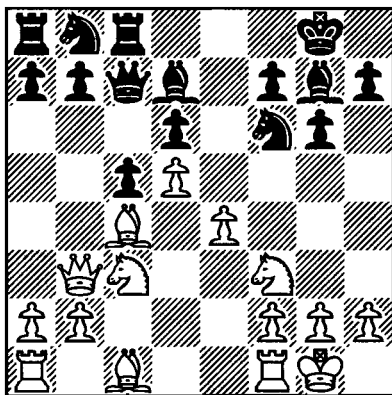


Diagram 22 (B)

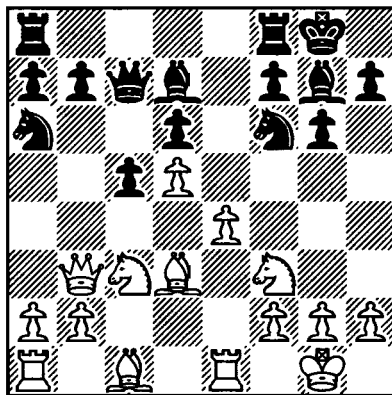


Diagram 23 (B)

### 12 Re1 (Diagram 23) 12...Rfe8

Black needs to take time out to deal with the e4-e5 advance. Against 12...Rab8 the immediate 13 e5 looks strong, especially so after 13...dxe5 14 Nxe5 Rfe8? 15 Bf4! Nh5 16 d6!.

**13 h3**

Things have settled and White now has enough time to play h2-h3, which both rules out ...Bg4 and gives the dark-squared bishop a bolt-hole on h2 after Bf4 and ...Nh5.

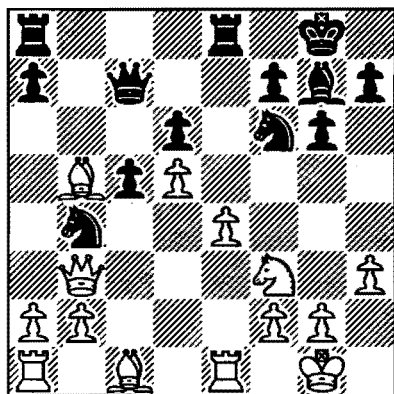
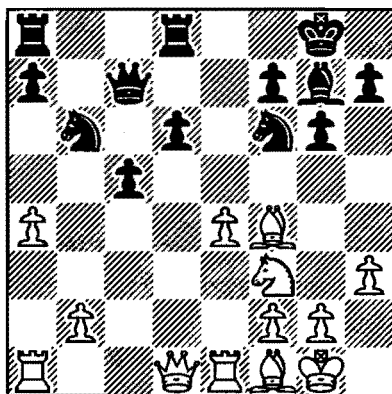
A good demonstration of how *not* to play the position as White is 13 Rb1?! Rab8 14 Bxa6? bxa6 15 Qc2 h6 16 Bf4 Nh5! 17 Bg3 f5!, as occurred in M.Gantner-O.Kurmann, Zurich 2007.

**13...Nb4**

13...Rab8 is another critical move, but White can fight for the advantage with 14 Bf4!. In this position 14...b5 15 Nxb5 Bxb5 16 Bxb5 Rxe4 doesn't work in view of 17 Rxe4 Nxe4 18 Qd3!, attacking both knights and meeting 18...Nb4 19 Qxe4 Rxb5 with 20 Qe8+.

**14 Bc4 b5!?**

After 14...Rab8 15 a4 a6 16 Bf4!? b5 17 axb5 axb5 18 Bf1 it looks at first like Black has made some progress on the queenside. However, White can argue that the b5-pawn needs attention and also that the knight on b4, though superficially active, actually gets in the way of Black's pawn advance. Meanwhile White is hitting b5 and d6, as well as angling for a timely e4-e5 blast in the centre.

**15 Nxb5 Bxb5 16 Bxb5 (Diagram 24)****Diagram 24 (B)****Diagram 25 (B)**

This position was reached in the game D.Shengelia-Y.Gonzalez Vidal, Barcelona 2007. The most logical continuation for Black would be 16...Rxe4, but then he experiences major concerns over the safety of his knight on b4: 17 Rxe4 Nxe4 18 a3 Qa5 (the only move) 19 Be2 f5 (White was threatening 20 Rb1 Na6 21 Qc4, hitting both knights), and now 20 Qc4! prevents ...Na6. Black can only hold on with

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

20...Qa4 (so that 21 Rb1 can be answered by 21...Qc2), but this puts him in a horrible self-pin. White has many attractive possibilities here, including even 21 Ra2!? Nxa2 22 Qxa4 Nxc1 23 Bc4.

Perhaps in view of these problems, Gonzalez Vidal instead chose 16...Reb8, regaining his pawn after 17 Bf1 Nbxtd5. However, following the further 18 Qd1 Nb6 19 Bf4 Rd8 20 a4 (**Diagram 25**) White's pressure against d6, allied to a very useful bishop-pair in this open position, promised him some advantage, which he eventually converted: 20...Nh5 21 Bg5 Bf6 22 Qc1 Qe7 23 Bxf6 Qxf6 24 e5! dxe5 25 Nxe5 Rac8 26 Ra3 Qg7 27 Rf3 Nf6 28 a5 Nbd5 29 Bc4 Rc7 30 Rd1 Re8 31 Nxf7! Rxf7 32 Rxd5 Kh8 33 Rxc5 Rfe7 34 Bf1 Ne4 35 Rc8 h6 36 Rxe8+ Rxe8 37 Re3 1-0.

### B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 Qa4+ Nbd7

This move certainly looks the most natural way to block the check, and I was a bit surprised to find that 7...Bd7 has been played more often, according to my database at least.

### 8 Bf4 (Diagram 26)

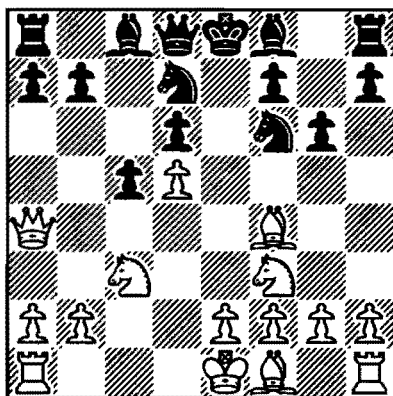


Diagram 26 (B)

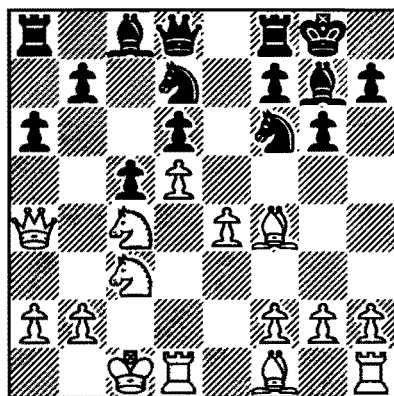


Diagram 27 (W)

### 8...a6

Immediately preparing to chase White's queen away and to expand on the queenside. Instead 8...Be7 was covered in Azmaiparashvili-Zubarev, and the remaining alternatives appear inferior:

a) 8...Nh5 9 Bg5 f6 10 Bh4 Kf7 11 e3 a6 12 Be2 b5 13 Qc2 Ng7 14 e4 Be7 15 a3 Rf8 16 0-0 Kg8 looked totally artificial for Black in R.Monterde-L.Ventos Navarro, Santa Coloma 1994.

b) 8...Qb6 9 e4! (9 0-0-0!?) 9...Qxb2 10 Rb1 Qxc3+ 11 Bd2 Nxd5 12 Bxc3 (12 exd5 Qf6 13 Bb5 is also promising for White) 12...Nxc3 13 Qb3 Nxb1 14 Ng5 Ne5 15 Bb5+ Ke7 16 f4 h6 17 fxe5 hxg5 18 exd6+ (Azmaiparashvili) and White enjoys a very strong attack.

### 9 e4 Rb8!

I think this is right. Black should act consistently and just get on with his queen-side expansion, whereas 9...Qb6?! is ugly, and on b6 the queen is prone to Nd2-c4. The game T.Kluge-A.Parry, correspondence 2002, continued 10 0-0-0 (10 Qc2 intending Nd2-c4 can't be bad either) 10...Bg7 11 Nd2 0-0 12 Nc4 Qd8 (**Diagram 27**) and now White safely captured on d6, as 13 Nxd6 Nh5 14 Be3 Nb6 15 Qa5 Qxd6 16 Bxc5 Qf4+ 17 Be3 Bxc3 18 bxc3 Qxe4 19 Rd4 is very good for him.

9...Nh5 is probably the best alternative: 10 Bg5 Be7 11 Bh6 (11 Be3!?) 11...Bf8 (or 11...Bf6 12 Qc2 Bg7 13 Bxg7 Nxd7 14 a4 with an edge to White, R.Cifuentes Parada-M.Marin, Spanish Team Championship 2000) 12 Bxf8 Kxf8 13 g3! Qf6 14 Bg2 b5 15 Qc2 b4 (15...Kg7!?) 16 Nd1 Ne5 17 Nxe5 Qxe5 18 Ne3! a5 19 Nc4 Qe7 20 0-0 Ba6 (Z.Azmaiparashvili-V.Belov, online blitz 2007) and here it looks very good for White on the kingside if he plays 21 f4.

### 10 Bd3

10 e5 is a direct attempt at a refutation, but 10...b5! 11 Qc2 dxe5 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 Bxe5 Bd6, as played in A.Kogan-J.Jenal, Zurich 2001, seems fine for Black. Thus White should just get on with development.

### 10...b5

10...Nh5 is also possible: 11 Bg5 Qc7 12 0-0 Bg7 13 Qc2 b5 14 Be2 0-0 15 a4 b4 16 Nb1 Re8 17 Nbd2 f5 was unclear in G.Margvelashvili-W.Moranda, Belfort 2005, but White should consider the plan 12 Qc2 b5 13 b3 Bg7 14 Rc1! – see the note to Black's 12th move.

### 11 Qc2 (Diagram 28)

11 Qd1 is similar and also not bad. In some cases the queen might be slightly better on d1, especially in lines with ...Qc7 answered by Rac1. One practical example continued 11...Nh5 (11...Qc7 12 0-0 Bg7?! is met by 13 e5!) 12 Bg5 Be7 (12...Qc7!?) 13 Bh6 Bf8 14 Qd2 Ne5? (the superior 14...Bxh6 15 Qxh6 Qf6 looks roughly equal) 15 Nxe5 dxe5 16 0-0 Bg7 17 Bxg7 Nxd7 18 f4! with a clear advantage to White, A.Zubarev-A.Kovchan, Alushta 2001.

### 11...Nh5

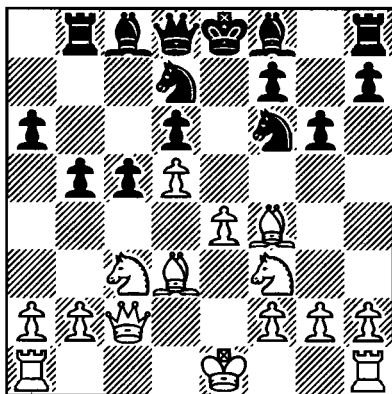
Black has quite a few choices here, but he must be careful.



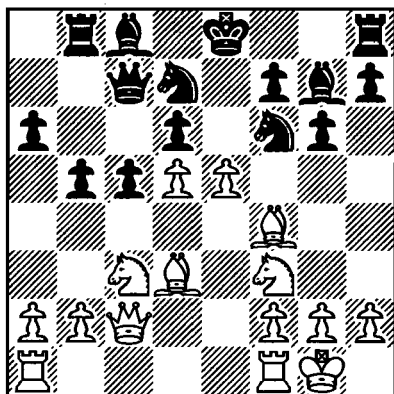
**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** 11...Qc7 12 0-0 Bg7?! (12...Nh5!) 13 e5! (**Diagram 29**) shows that Black cannot expect to treat the position exactly like the Modern Main Line – he must take more care over his development.



In G.Margvelashvili-A.Golizadeh, Batumi 2006, Black was punished for his negligence after 13...Nh5? (13...dxe5 14 Nxe5 is also horrific for Black; 13...Nxe5 14 Nxe5 Nh5! is the only chance) 14 exd6 Qd8 15 Qe2+ Kf8 16 Qe7+!.



**Diagram 28 (B)**



**Diagram 29 (B)**

Black can also run into difficulties if he protects d6 with 11...Qe7. After 12 0-0 Bg7?, 13 e5! again embarrasses Black on the e-file. 12...c4 is stronger, but following 13 Be2 Black still has issues to deal with: for example, 13...Bg7 14 Nd4! or 13...b4 14 Na4 Qxe4 15 Qxc4 Qxc4 16 Bxc4 Be7 17 Rfe1.

However, 11...Ng4!? is a reasonable option, and 12 0-0 Nde5 13 Nxe5 (13 a4!?) 13...Nxe5 14 a4 c4!? (14...b4 is met by 15 Bxe5! dxe5 16 Nd1, intending Ne3-c4) 15 Be2 Bg7 16 axb5 axb5 17 b4 (17 Ra7!?) 17...0-0 18 Ra7 f5 19 Qd2 reaches an unclear position in which chances look roughly level.

Finally, 11...Be7 12 0-0 0-0 13 b3!? (13 Rfe1 Re8) 13...Qc7 14 h3 Re8 15 Rac1 Bf8 16 Rfe1 Bg7 17 Qd2 offers White a small edge. This position very much resembles the Modern Main Line, but with both players losing tempi (White with his queen and Black with his Benoni bishop).

### **12 Bg5 (Diagram 30) 12...Be7**

If Black wants to develop with ...Bg7 then 12...Qc7 is the move to play, and this might well be the most logical choice. S.Kauko-N.Kizimenko, correspondence 2000, continued 13 b3 (13 a4!?) 13...Bg7 14 Rc1 0-0 15 0-0 Nb6 (alternatively, 15...c4? loses a pawn after 16 bxc4 bxc4 17 Na4!, but 15...Re8 would be a typical move when the chances seem fairly balanced) 16 Rfe1 f5!? (16...Re8), and now I think that 17 exf5 Bxf5 18 Re7 Qc8 19 Ne4 is the most promising continuation for White.

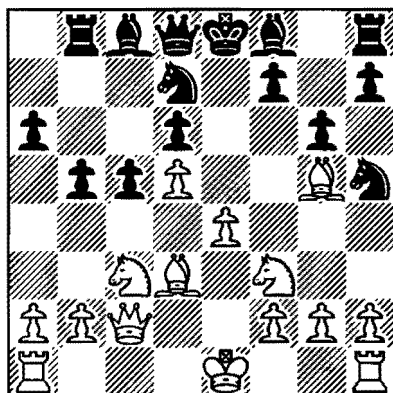
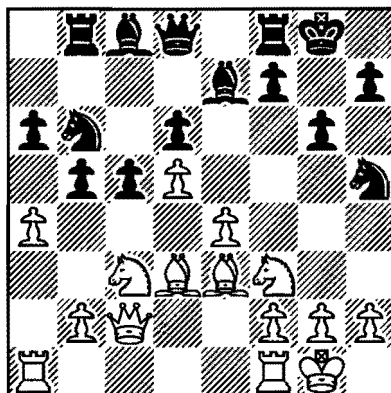
**13 Be3**

Black should be prepared to answer 13 Bh6 with 13...Bf8.

**13...0-0 14 0-0 Nb6**

In some ways it's tempting to play 14...c4, but Black has to be wary of giving up the d4-square. This is especially the case given that Nd4 comes with tempo due to the threat of Nc6, and 15 Be2 Bb7 16 Nd4 does indeed look pleasant for White.

14...Re8, with similar play to that seen in the note on 11...Be7, is probably Black's best option.

**15 a4! (Diagram 31)****Diagram 30 (B)****Diagram 31 (B)**

This move presents Black with some problems, as he always has to watch out for a timely a4-a5 hitting his knight.

**15...b4**

After 15...c4 16 Be2 Black finds it difficult to keep his queenside pawns intact without compromising his position: for example, 16...b4 17 a5! Nd7 18 Na4 or 16...Bd7 17 axb5 axb5 18 Nd4 b4 19 Ncb5, with advantage to White in both cases.

**16 Nd1 f5 17 Bh6 Ng7**

We have been following the game D.Arutnian-P.Simacek, Olomouc 2006. Now 18 exf5 Bxf5 19 Ne3 Bxd3 20 Qxd3 a5 21 b3 Bf6 22 Ra2 Rf7 23 Re2 kept an edge for White, and I also like the idea of 18 a5 fxe4 19 Bxe4 Nd7 20 Ne3 since the possibility of Nc4 is always a concern for Black.

## Conclusion

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7 Qa4+ is a worthwhile alternative to the main lines, and can certainly be recommended to white players who are keen to steer the game into relatively uncharted territory. It undoubtedly carries some surprise value, while presenting Black with early problems to solve. Furthermore, its score in practice (an impressive 62%, albeit in less than one hundred games) indicates that Black's task over the board is not a simple one.

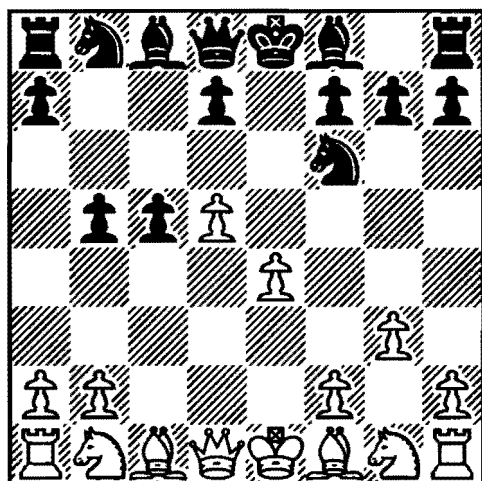
After analysing the possibilities for both sides in this chapter, my impression is that White has pretty good chances of keeping an advantage after 7...Bd7 8 Qb3, and that Black's best chance to equalize lies with 7...Nbd7.

## Chapter Two

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# The Sosonko-Kramnik Gambit

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 b5 6 e4! (Diagram 1)**



**Diagram 1 (B)**

The Catalan has enjoyed something of a renaissance of late, largely due to the patronage of the 14th World Champion, Vladimir Kramnik. Not everyone wants to contest the Catalan, however, and 3...c5, rather than 3...d5, has been gaining ever-

increasing support. Following 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 Black can take play into the Modern Benoni proper with 5...d6, but many 3...c5 exponents aren't genuine Benoni players. Thus they prefer the uncompromising 5...b5! which has long enjoyed a decent reputation. That was at least until 6 e4, an old gambit idea of Sosonko's, was brought back on to the world stage by Kramnik. Hence my christening of 6 e4 as the Sosonko-Kramnik Gambit. It poses immediate problems for Black and I believe that 6 e4 is the most critical test of his ambitious early move order.

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□ V.Kramnik ■ E.Alekseev

Tal Memorial, Moscow 2007

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### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 b5 6 e4! Nxe4

Critical and one of Black's problems, not least for an opponent surprised over the board by the Sosonko-Kramnik, is that Black lacks a good way to decline the gambit. For a start he can't continue his standard Benoni development:

a) 6...g6? fails to detect either of White's threats and 7 e5 Qe7 8 Nf3 Ng4 (Black's position also badly fails to convince after both 8...Bg7 9 Bxb5 0-0 10 0-0 Ng4 11 Bg5 and 8...d6? 9 Bxb5+ Bd7 10 0-0!) 9 Bxb5 Nxe5 10 0-0 (**Diagram 2**) leaves Black in serious danger of losing a miniature, especially since the e-file is open. As 10...Bg7 loses to 11 d6 Qe6 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 13 Qf3, Black would have to try 10...f6, but I don't think that we need to analyse any further after 11 Nc3.

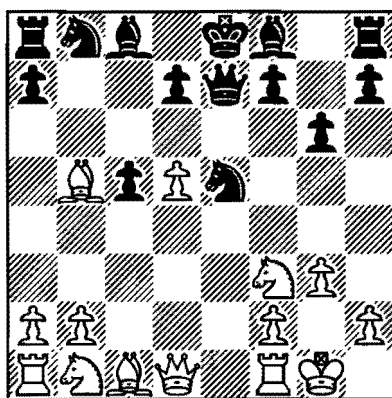


Diagram 2 (B)

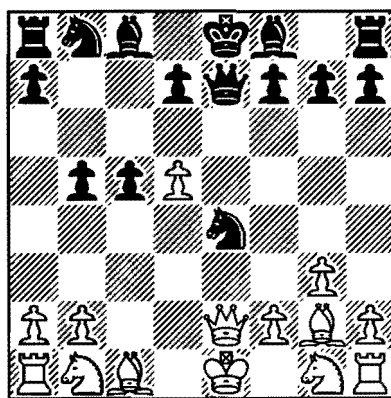


Diagram 3 (B)

b) 6...d6?! 7 Bxb5+ Bd7 8 Bxd7+ Nbx d7 gives Black a little bit of compensation as White has weakened his kingside with g3. However, it's hard to imagine that it will be anywhere near enough so long as White remains careful after, say, 9 Nc3

g6 10 Nf3 Bg7 11 0-0 0-0 12 Bf4.

Perhaps 6...Qe7 and 6...Bb7 are better alternatives, although, as we will see below, White retains the upper hand after both of those too.

### 7 Qe2 Qe7 8 Bg2 (Diagram 3) 8...Nd6

A solid choice. Black has to avoid, of course, 8...Nf6? 9 Qxe7+ Bxe7 10 d6, but the combative 8...f5!? is probably a more critical choice, as we will analyse below in the Looking A Little Deeper section.

### 9 Be3 b4?!

Now Black is definitely worse. More combative might be 9...c4 10 Nc3 a6?! (this is probably too slow, although even after the superior 10...b4 White has a pleasant choice between 11 Na4 and taking the exchange with 11 Nb5!? Nxb5 12 d6 Nxd6 13 Bxa8), but after 11 Nh3! (developing the kingside and without blocking the g2-bishop; instead Ligterink has suggested 11 Bc5 and after, say, 11...Qxe2+ 12 Ngxe2 Nf5 13 Bxf8 Kxf8 14 a4 b4 15 Ne4 White retains reasonable play for the pawn despite the exchange of queens, but I prefer the text or even 11 0-0-0!?, followed by Nf3, Rhe1 and perhaps then Nd4) 11...g6 (and not 11...Nf5? 12 d6) 12 0-0 Bg7 13 Rfe1 (Diagram 4) White is doing rather well. Indeed Black pretty much has to give up an exchange, but 13...0-0 14 Bc5 Qxe2 15 Rxe2 Nf5 16 Bxf8 Bxf8 doesn't offer him enough for it since White can invade the back rank with 17 Re8.

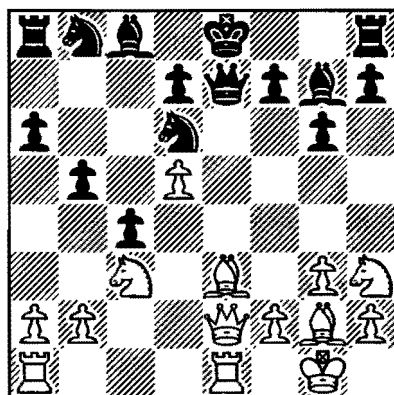


Diagram 4 (B)

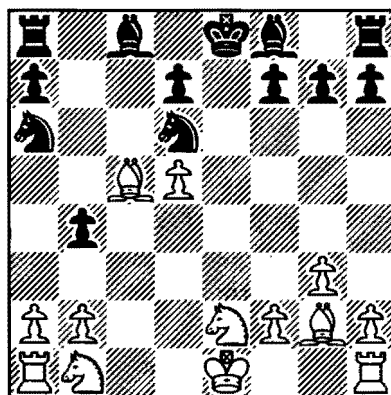


Diagram 5 (W)

I should also mention two fairly obscure games quoted in the latest *New In Chess Yearbook* (86). In Iliushina-Pokusaev, Novokuznetsk 2007, 9...Bb7!? 10 Bxc5 (the reader should also investigate 10 Nc3!?, with the possible continuation 10...b4 11 Nb5 Nxb5 12 Qxb5 Ba6 13 Qa4 Qd6 14 0-0-0, followed by 15 Bf4, maintaining the initiative) 10...Qxe2+ 11 Nxe2 Na6 12 Bd4 Nb4 13 Na3 Bxd5 14 Bxd5 Nxd5 15 Rd1

gave White decent play for her pawn, while Iliushina-Petukhov, Novokuznetsk 2007, deviated with 9...Na6!? and after 10 Nh3 g6 11 0-0 Bg7 12 Re1 0-0 13 Nc3 b4 14 Na4 White again had decent play for her pawn.

Do expect to see more of the sensible developing moves 9...Bb7 and 9...Na6. Indeed, the latter has been tried in two further games since this chapter was first written. Instead of 10 Nh3, White might do better to lure the black queenside pawns forward with 10 Nc3!? b4 11 Na4 c4 (11...g6 can be met by 12 0-0-0!?, but in A.Moiseenko-P.Carlsson, European Championship, Plovdiv 2008, White preferred the simple 12 Nxc5 Nxc5 13 Bxc5 a5 14 Bd4 Rg8 15 0-0-0, which saw him regain his pawn while retaining an edge due to his safer king position) 12 Nh3, as recommended by Sosonko. This idea was tested in the game C.Batchuluun-S.Van Eijk, Novokuznetsk 2008, in which Black preferred 10...Rb8 and after 11 a4!? Nf5 12 d6! Nxd6 13 Nd5 Qe5 14 f4 Qe6 15 axb5 Bb7, White should have settled for 16 f5 Qe5 17 0-0-0! with a strong initiative.

### **10 Bxc5 Qxe2+ 11 Nxe2 Na6 (Diagram 5)**

Alekseev was probably relying on being able to catch up in development after this, but Kramnik was ready with a strong novelty.

### **12 Bxd6!**

Improving over an earlier game, G.Sosonko-F.Olafsson, Wijk aan Zee 1977. That had seen 12 Bd4 Nf5 13 0-0 (Sosonko points out that even here White can gain a small advantage with 13 Nd2!? and after, for example, 13...Nxd4 14 Nxd4 Bc5 15 N2b3 Black is under some pressure, although I suspect that 13...Bb7!? is a superior try) 13...Bc5! 14 Bxc5 Nxc5 15 Nd2 Ba6 16 Rfc1 Nd3 and Black developed sufficient counterplay.

### **12...Bxd6 13 Nd2**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Black might enjoy an unopposed dark-squared bishop, but that is about to be destabilized, while his other two minor pieces are hardly ideally placed.

White thus has a pleasant edge, although Black remains far from easy to break down and Kramnik has to manoeuvre well.

### **13...Rb8**

White also begins to put his lead in development to good use in the line 13...Bb7 14 Nc4 Bc5 15 0-0!? (Black may be able to grovel after 15 Na5 0-0-0 16 0-0 Rhe8: the loss of his light-squared bishop is surprisingly not too dangerous for him) 15...Rc8 16 Rac1 when a timely Na5, probably after first doubling rooks on the c-file, will add to Black's difficulties.

### **14 Nc4 (Diagram 6) 14...Be7**

Now Black's dark-squared bishop becomes a target on f6. However, no better was



14...Bc5!?, as suggested after the game by Kramnik, because 15 d6 0-0 16 0-0 maintains a pleasant pull. White can direct his rooks to either the c- or the e-file, as well as bring a knight to d5, such as with 16...Bb7 17 Bxb7 Rxb7 18 Nf4.

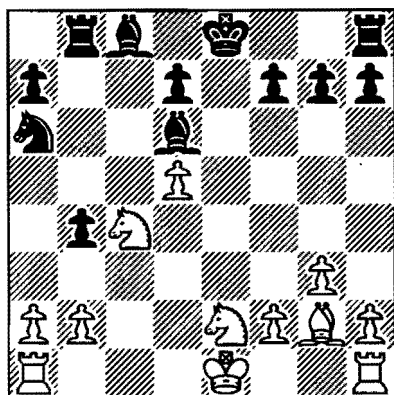
**15 d6 Bf6 16 Nf4 Nc5 17 0-0 Ba6**

Black has nothing better than to transpose after 17...0-0 18 Nd5 with 18...Ba6, since 18...Bd8 19 Rfe1 would keep him horribly tied up.

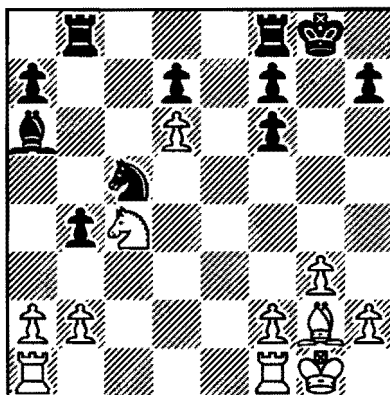
**18 Nd5! 0-0**

White regains his piece with interest after 18...Bxc4 19 Nxf6+ gxf6 20 Rfc1.

**19 Nxf6+ gxf6 (Diagram 7) 20 Bd5?!**



**Diagram 6 (B)**



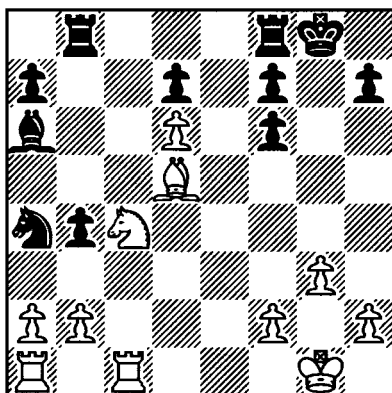
**Diagram 7 (W)**

Placing both minor pieces on good central squares looks very natural, but now Black is able to attack the d6-pawn. Thus White should have first inserted 20 Rfd1! when he maintains an edge since 20...Bxc4 21 Rdc1 again regains the piece.

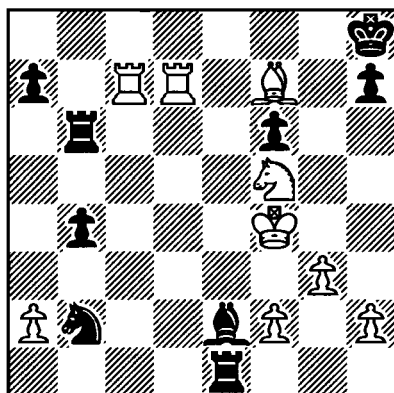
**20...Na4?**

Alekseev is, of course, fully aware that knights on the rim are dim, but he must have thought that his counterplay against b2 was worth something. However, Black is now undone by some powerful play from Kramnik. Instead 20...Rfe8 21 Rfd1 Re2 22 b3 (Sosonko) would have restricted White to an edge, but I haven't been able to find anything against 20...Rfc8!, not least because 21 b3 (or 21 Rfe1 Nd3) 21...Bxc4 22 Bxc4 Ne4 23 Rfd1 Rb6 24 a3 bxa3 25 Rxa3 Rxd6 26 Rxd6 Nxd6 27 Rxa7 Nxc4 28 bxc4 Rxc4 29 Rxd7 fizzles out to a draw. This game has been widely considered a crushing positional masterpiece, but it does seem that here Alekseev missed a good opportunity to save himself.

**21 Rfc1! (Diagram 8)**



**Diagram 8 (B)**



**Diagram 9 (B)**

## 21...Rfe8

Not the most consistent of follow-ups, but after 21...Bxc4 22 Rxc4 Nxb2 (or 22...Nb6 23 Rg4+ Kh8 24 Bb3) 23 Rg4+ Kh8 24 Rb1 Nd3 25 Rd4 Nc5 26 Rdx4 Rxb4 27 Rxb4 White's superior pieces dominate the board.

## 22 Ne3! Rb6?!

After this the tactics favour White. Probably the last chance to grovel was 22...Nxb2 23 Rc7 Bb5, although White retains a clear advantage after 24 Rb1 Nd3 25 Rxa7.

## 23 Rc7 Rxd6 24 Rd1

Kramnik has calculated everything most impressively. White's active pieces now combine in a decisive attack, while Black's sorry minor pieces can but look on from afar.

## 24...Kh8 25 Nf5 Rb6 26 Bxf7 Nxb2 27 Rdx7 Re1+ 28 Kg2 Bf1+ 29 Kf3 Be2+ 30 Kf4 (Diagram 9) 30...Rb8

This doesn't help, but mate would have followed in the event of 30...Nd3+ 31 Rxd3 Bxd3 32 Rc8+.

## 31 Bc4 1-0

Powerful play from Kramnik, but does Black have to meekly retreat his knight to d6 in the opening?

## Looking A Little Deeper

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 g3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 b5 6 e4!

Not only should this approach appeal to the Catalan player (White gets active play for his pawn and, as we have seen, can easily emerge from the opening with a nagging, long-term pull), but it is also rather fresh, having been played in just 15 games that I could track down. However, an even rarer idea is Kramnik's previous choice, 6 Nd2!? (**Diagram 10**).

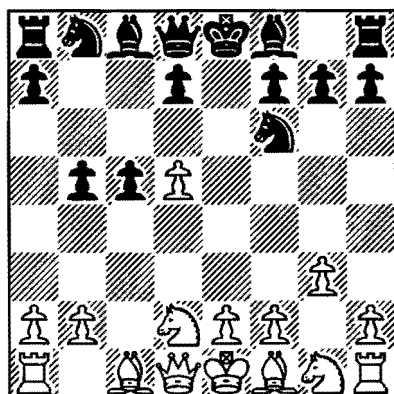


Diagram 10 (B)

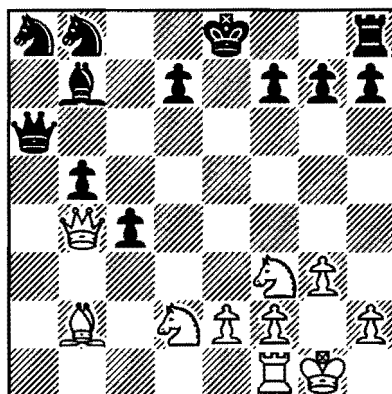


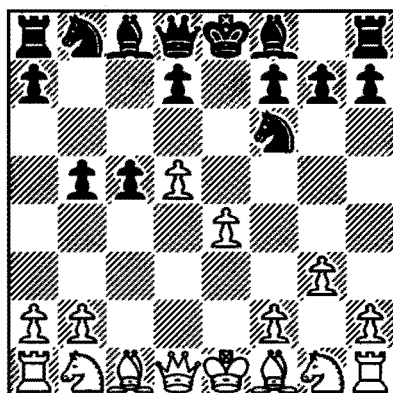
Diagram 11 (B)

Possibly Kramnik was put off 6 Nd2 by the course of the game V.Kramnik-L.Aronian, 5th (rapid) matchgame, Yerevan 2007, not that matters were at all clear after 6...Nxd5!? (very combative; Black might also play more slowly and 6...d6 7 e4 a6 8 a4 b4 9 Bg2 g6 10 Nc4 a5 was preferred in the later game B.Avruch-Se.Ivanov, European Club Cup, Kemer 2007: the immediate 11 e5 failed to bring White any advantage, so he should prefer to either develop with 11 Nf3 Nbd7 12 0-0 or try 11 Qe2!? Ba6 12 e5 Bxc4 13 Qxc4 dxe5 14 Nf3, with reasonable chances for an advantage) 7 Bg2 Nc7! (7...Bb7 8 Qb3 c4 9 Nxc4 regains the pawn with advantage) 8 Bxa8 Nxa8 (when did you last see the king's knight reach a8 after just 8 moves?) 9 b4!? (vigorously fighting for the initiative, rather than allow Black to demonstrate compensation with his unopposed light-squared bishop and central majority) 9...c4 10 a4! Bxb4 11 Qc2 Bb7 12 Ngf3 a6 13 axb5 axb5 14 Qb2 Qf6 15 Qxb4! Qxa1 16 0-0 Qa6 17 Bb2 (**Diagram 11**) with decent dark-square pressure for the pawn. Much remains to be discovered within this fascinating sequence and, indeed, I suspect that Kramnik may well have switched to 6 e4 not due to a dislike of 6 Nd2, but because he considered 6 e4 an even more promising try.

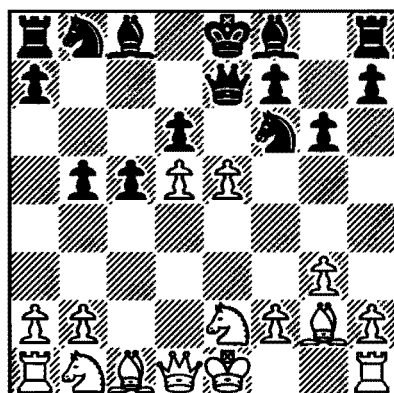
Returning to 6 e4 (**Diagram 12**):

### 6...Nxe4

We've already seen that both 6...g6 and 6...d6 fail to convince, but practice has seen a couple of other options:



**Diagram 12 (B)**



**Diagram 13 (B)**

a) 6...Qe7?! was tried in another recent game with 6 e4, but was surely more of a case of desperation than preparation in A.Ushenina-P.Carlsson, Wijk aan Zee 2008. Following 7 Bg2 d6 (7...Nxe4?! 8 Qe2 transposes to our main game, but even stronger is the energetic 8 Ne2! d6 9 0-0 when the open e-file spells serious trouble: for example, 9...Nf6 – or 9...f5 10 Re1 Kf7 11 Nec3 and White will regain his pawn on e4 with a huge initiative – 10 Re1 Qb7 11 Nd4+ Be7 12 Nc6 Nxc6 13 dxc6 Qc7 14 Nc3 Be6 15 Nxb5 Qa5 16 a4!? and while Black has plugged the e-file, that has come at some cost on the queenside) 8 Ne2! (refusing to both lose time defending e4 and to block the fianchettoed bishop; instead Ushenina played more conservatively, but after 8 Qe2 b4! 9 f4 Ba6 10 Qe3 g5?! 11 Ne2 Nbd7 12 e5?! gxf4 13 gxf4 Rg8 Carlsson enjoyed active and excellent counterplay – it's supposed to be White, not Black, who gains the initiative in the Sosonko-Kramnik Gambit!) 8...g6 White has a strong central strike.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Whenever Black declines the pawn on move 6, White should always be looking for ways to rip open the e-file and to make good use of his light-squared bishop. Here 9 e5! (Diagram 13) fits the bill perfectly.

Following 9...Qxe5 10 0-0 Bg7 (it's not at all easy to find an improvement for Black: note too the lines 10...Qh5 11 Re1 Be7 12 Qb3! and 10...Bd7 11 Re1 Kd8 12 Na3! Qf5 13 Nf4 Bg7 14 Bh3, with some advantage in both cases) 11 Nec3 we've transposed to H.De Carbonnel-T.Wiersma, correspondence 1978 (which had actually seen the move order 9 0-0 Bg7 10 e5 Qxe5 11 Nec3, but Black should have preferred 9...Nbd7): 11...0-0 12 Nxb5 Qe7 13 N1c3 (even more precise might be 13 Bf4!? Ne8

14 Re1 Qd8 15 N1c3, with the idea of saving a tempo on a2-a4, and again 15...a6 16 Rxe8! Rxe8 17 Nxd6 Rf8 18 Nxc8 Qxc8 19 d6 gives White more than enough for the exchange) 13...Ba6 14 Re1 Qd8 15 a4 Bxb5 16 Nxb5 Ne8 17 Bf4 a6 18 Rxe8! Rxe8 19 Nxd6 Rf8 20 Nc4 and White's passed d-pawn, well supported by his powerful bishop-pair, supplied excellent compensation for the exchange.

b) 6...Bb7, as played by the respected Israeli Grandmaster and theoretician Alon Greenfeld, is probably the best alternative to accepting the pawn. After 7 Bg2 d6 8 a4 (8 Nf3!? Nxe4 9 0-0 Be7 10 Re1 Nf6 11 Nh4 is a lively gambit alternative) 8...b4 9 Nd2 g6 10 Nc4 Ba6 11 Qc2 Bg7 12 Nf3 0-0 13 Nfd2 Nbd7! the position was about equal in L.Manor-A.Greenfeld, Rishon le Zion 1996. White's 8th move, however, only served to assist Black's light-squared bishop, and while some readers may wish to look to improve at that point, there's also another idea.

When first writing this article in mid-February I suggested 7 Bg5!? h6 (I'm not entirely sure how to mark the extremely ambitious 7...Be7!? 8 d6 Nxe4; following 9 Bxe7 Qa5+ 10 Ke2 Qb4 Black has some play for the piece, but I think that White should be doing well, whether or not Black goes after the h1-rook: for example, 11 Qc2! Nc6 12 Nf3 Nd4+!? 13 Nxd4 cxd4 14 Bg2 d3+ 15 Qxd3 Qxb2+ 16 Nd2 Nc3+ 17 Qxc3! Qxc3 18 Bxb7 and as Black can't castle, I'd take White's three pieces over Black's extra queen) 8 Bxf6 Qxf6 9 Qb3 (**Diagram 14**) as a critical alternative, swapping some dark-square control to take control of the light squares. Then in early March, *New in Chess Yearbook 86* arrived, containing an article on 6 e4 by no less an authority than Sosonko himself! Furthermore, he rather liked 7 Bg5 and felt that White was doing well here after all of 9...b4 10 Nd2, 9...a6 10 a4 and 9...c4!? 10 Bxc4.

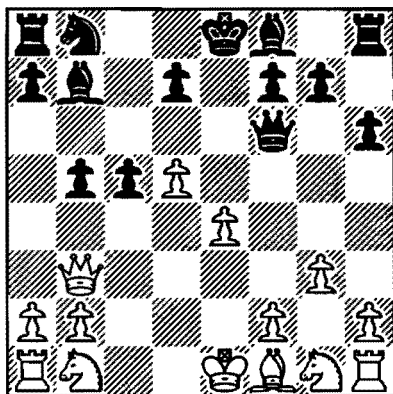


Diagram 14 (B)

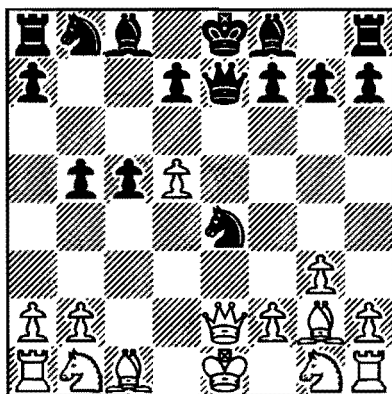
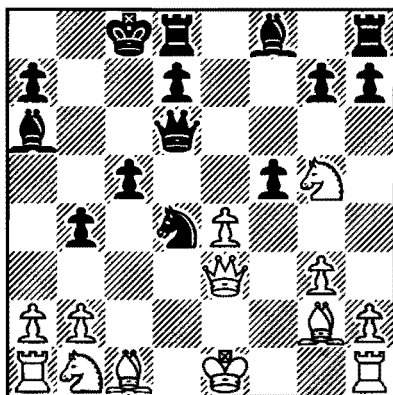


Diagram 15 (B)

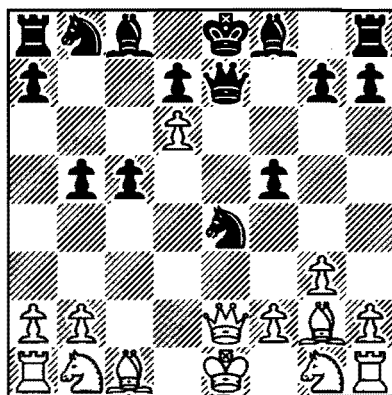
7 Qe2 Qe7 8 Bg2 (Diagram 15) 8...f5

Critical as Black tries to keep the e-file plugged, rather than retreat with Alekseev's 8...Nd6. However, if White can quickly open the position after 8...f5, then once again he may well gain a powerful initiative. I believe that it now makes sense to consider chronologically the evolution of this variation:

a) 9 Nh3 b4! 10 d6 Qxd6 11 f3 wins a piece, but with 11...Ba6 12 Qe3 Nc6 13 fxe4 0-0-0 Black gains good attacking chances. In the game G.Sosonko-J.Barle, Ljubljana 1977, White must have been fairly relieved that his draw offer was accepted after 14 Ng5. Sosonko writes that he felt 'that White may actually be in trouble', and certainly I don't like White's position after 14...Nd4 (**Diagram 16**): for example, 15 Qd2 (it's not essential to obstruct the queenside pieces and perhaps White has better chances to save himself in the extremely messy position which results after 15 Qf2!? Bd3! 16 Nf7 Qa6 17 Nxd8 Nc2+ 18 Kd1 Kxd8 19 Bg5+ Kc8) 15...fxe4! 16 Nxe4 (16 Nf7 Qe6 17 Nxd8 Kxd8 leaves White badly paralyzed, extra rook or not) 16...Qg6 17 Kf2 d5 18 Ng5 h6 19 Nf3 and now Black might recoup some material with 19...Nc2 or continue to attack with 19...Qf6.



**Diagram 16 (W)**



**Diagram 17 (B)**

b) Next time out Sosonko tried 9 Nc3?!, but after 9...Nxc3 10 bxc3 Qxe2+ 11 Nxe2 Na6 12 0-0 Rb8 13 Bf4 d6 his compensation was rather unconvincing in G.Sosonko-J.Timman, Amsterdam 1980. It's thus not a surprise that 6 e4 was abandoned by its creator for other paths, but evidently Kramnik has found something here.

c) 9 d6! (**Diagram 17**) fits in very well with the active ethos of the Sosonko-Kramnik Gambit, and is, I believe, the move that Kramnik has discovered. Following 9...Qe6 (the pawn is poisoned: 9...Qxd6? 10 f3 Nc6 11 fxe4 Nd4 12 Qd1 doesn't give Black enough for the piece since White, in contrast to variation 'a', doesn't suffer any major issues developing his pieces) we have:

c1) 10 g4!? is the most energetic continuation. A critical line runs 10...g6 (maintaining the pawn on f5, but at the cost of an opening of kingside lines; the alternative is 10...Bb7 – note that 10...Qc4 11 Qe3 is likely to transpose after both 11...Bb7 and 11...Qd4 – 11 gxf5 Qc4 12 Qe3 Qd4, but after 13 Nc3 Qxe3+ 14 Bxe3 Nxd6 15 Bxb7 Nxb7 16 Nxb5 Na6 17 0-0-0 while matters aren't totally clear, I rather like White's ongoing initiative) 11 gxf5 gxf5 12 Nh3 Bxd6 (12...Bb7? 13 Ng5 wins material and for not enough after 13...Qxd6 14 f3 Nc6 15 fxe4 Nd4 16 Qh5+; 12...Nc6 is also an option, but Black must then avoid 13 Nc3 Nd4? 14 Qh5+ Qg6 15 Nxe4 when White again picks up material) 13 Nc3 Nc6 (Black comes under some pressure after 13...Bb7?! 14 Ng5 Qe7 15 Ngxe4 fxe4 16 Bxe4, and neither does 13...Be7?! 14 Nxb5 look at all pleasant for him) 14 Nxe4 fxe4 15 Ng5 (**Diagram 18**) when White maintains the initiative and will regain at least one of the sacrificed pawns. Indeed, I believe that White is probably better here, as shown by the possible continuation 15...Nd4!? (a forcing attempt to avoid 15...Qe5 16 Be3! which threatens a large check on h5 and also prepares to go long) 16 Nxe6 Nxe2 17 Ng7+ Kf7 18 Nf5 Nxc1 19 Nxd6+ Ke6 20 Nxe4 (20 Bxe4 Kxd6 21 Bxa8 Nd3+ 22 Kd2 Nxb2 is also rather obscure, but does give Black a handy pawn clump for the exchange) 20...Nd3+ 21 Kd2 d5 when the position isn't at all clear, but after 22 Kxd3! dxe4+ 23 Bxe4 Rb8 24 Rhg1 it strikes me that only White can be better with his slightly more active pieces and less exposed king.

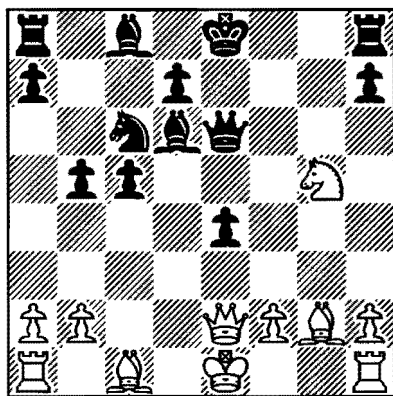


Diagram 18 (B)

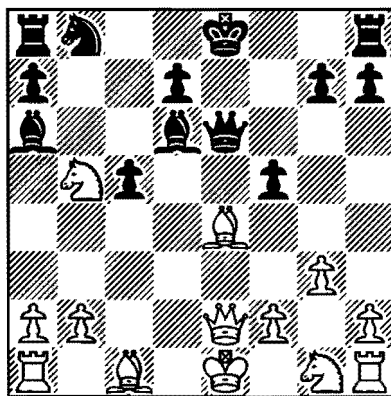


Diagram 19 (B)

c2) 10 Nc3 is also possible, but it seems that Black can grab with 10...Bxd6. I haven't been able to find anything too convincing for White here, and so was curious when I found the very recent game, R.Van Wessel-J.Timman, Arnhem (rapid) 2008, at the end of Sosonko's excellent article. That continued 11 Nxb5 (another option is 11 Nh3!? Bb7 12 Ng5, but after 12...Qc4 13 Ngxe4 fxe4 14 Nxe4 Qxe2+ 15

Kxe2 Bxe4 16 Bxe4 Nc6 White's strong light-squared bishop doesn't bring him more than some compensation for the pawn, and I'm not too enamoured by this possibility) 11...Ba6 12 Bxe4 (**Diagram 19**) 12...Bxb5 (Black can also simplify and equalize with 12...fxe4 13 Nxd6+ Qxd6 14 Qxe4+ Qe7 15 Qxe7+ Kxe7 – Timman) 13 Bxf5 and now Black should have settled for a roughly level position with 13...Bxe2 14 Bxe6 Bb5 15 Bd5 Bc6 16 Bxc6 Nxc6 (Sosonko).

d) That White should act vigorously was demonstrated by the recent game A.Moiseenko-E.Shaposhnikov, Russian Team Championship 2008: 9 Be3?! (slow, and now White is forced into a slightly awkward pin) 9...b4 10 Nd2 Ba6 11 Nc4 g6 12 Nh3 Bg7 13 Rc1 0-0 14 0-0 d6 15 Nf4 and here a draw was agreed, but Black should really have played on with 15...Nd7 16 Ne6 Ne5.

## Conclusion

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It had been thought that 3 g3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 b5!? was a lively and reasonable way to avoid both the Catalan and the Fianchetto Benoni. However, after 6 e4! it is White who enjoys the greater share of the fun. For now the ball is very much in Black's court. He must either try to improve at move 9 over Kramnik-Alekseev or risk the fascinating complications which arise after the critical 8...f5 9 d6! (a handy novelty with which to shock the opponent!) 9...Qe6 10 g4!?



## Chapter Three

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# Radjabov's Extended Queenside Fianchetto

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 10 Nd2 b6!? (Diagram 1)

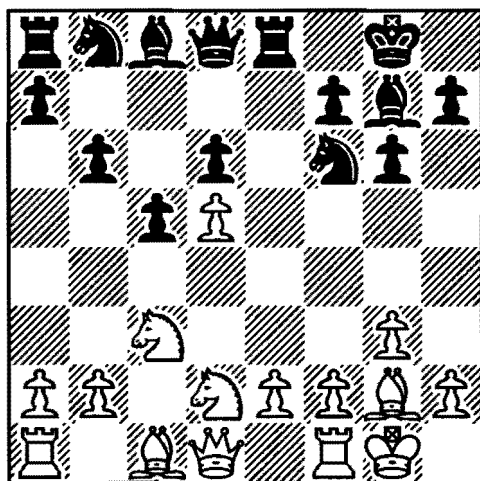


Diagram 1 (W)

The Fianchetto Benoni is not an easy opening to surprise, but some readers may want to avoid the main line 9...a6 10 a4 Nbd7. Not only is White's position fairly solid there, but the play can quickly becoming quite forcing. How, though, to sur-

prise White? An immediate 9...b6 does not have a good reputation, but what about delaying the queenside fianchetto by a move? Against the flexible 9...Re8, White's main choice is 10 Nd2, but then 10...b6 becomes very much an option. Just look at the early initiative Radjabov obtained with it against no lesser player than Aronian!

□ L.Aronian ■ T.Radjabov

Wijk aan Zee 2008

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0  
(Diagram 2)

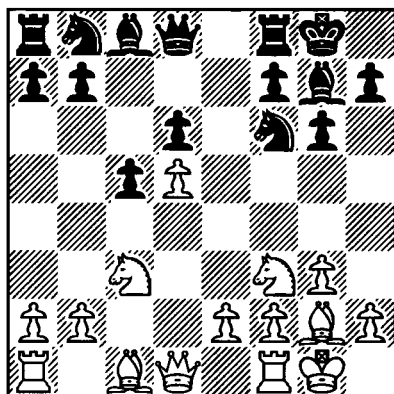


Diagram 2 (B)

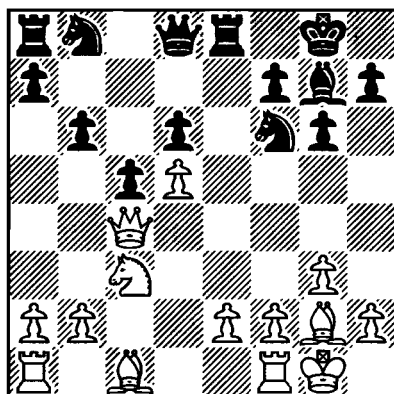


Diagram 3 (B)

I must admit that I've adjusted the move order to display a more common route into the Fianchetto Variation. Aronian-Radjabov actually transposed via a King's Indian: 2...g6 3 Nc3 Bg7 4 g3 c5 5 d5 0-0 6 Bg2 d6 7 Nf3 e6 8 0-0 exd5 9 cxd5.

**9...Re8 10 Nd2 b6!?**

Black might again prefer to take play into the main line with 10...a6 11 a4 Nbd7, but why give White a variation which he must be expecting? Instead the queenside fianchetto is very logical: Black prepares to meet Nc4 with ...Ba6, thereby solving the classic Benoni problem of what to do with his least useful minor piece. Furthermore 10...b6 is by no means a bad choice, despite being far from fashionable (at least before this high-level encounter).

**11 Re1**

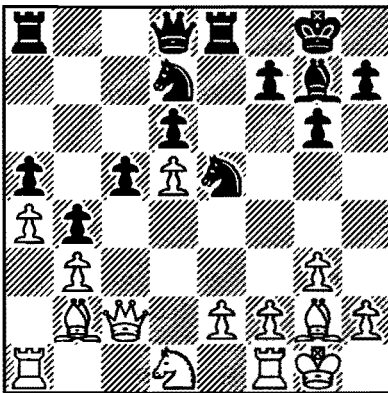
Prophylactically defending the e2-pawn, and possibly preparing to later advance with e2-e4. As we will see in the Looking a Little Deeper section, below, White's main move is 11 a4. Instead one of the main points of Black's system becomes apparent after 11 Nc4 Ba6! 12 Qb3 (12 b3? b5 13 Ne3 b4 14 Na4 Ne4 already leaves

White in trouble) 12...Bxc4 13 Qxc4 (**Diagram 3**).

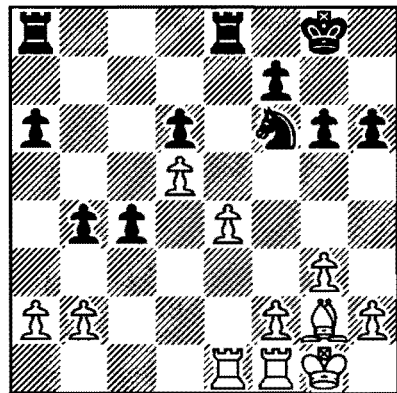


**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** With 13...a6! Black prepares to expand on the queenside. White can't prevent this because 14 a4 runs into 14...b5! anyhow, exploiting the undefended rook on a1.

Black has good counterplay after 14...b5, as was shown by 15 Qd3 (15 Qb3 b4 16 Nd1 a5 17 Ne3 Nbd7 18 Nc4 Nb6 led to similar play in R.Almeida-F.Gonzalez Velez, Barcelona 1993: White is unable to maintain his blockade of c4) 15...b4 (Black mustn't, though, become too ambitious just yet: 15...c4?! 16 Qc2 b4 17 Nd1 Qc7 18 Ne3 Rc8 19 Bd2 enabled White to halt the onrushing pawns in C.Martin Luis-Z.Vargyas, Budapest 2003) 16 Nd1 a5 17 b3 (or 17 Ne3 Nbd7 18 Nc4 Nb6 19 Bf4 Nxc4 20 Qxc4 Qe7 21 Bf3 Nd7 22 Rab1 g5 23 Be3 Ne5 and with the blockade of c4 lifted, Black was again doing quite well in B.Siembab-P.Lagowski, Warsaw (rapid) 2006) 17...Ng4! (Black wastes no time in fighting for the c4-square, and, of course, he doesn't have any objection to a trade of both the dark-squared bishops and a pair of knights, after which White may well find himself saddled with a bad light-squared bishop) 18 Bb2 Ne5 19 Qc2 Nbd7 (**Diagram 4**) 20 f4!? (trying to gain some counterplay; 20 Ne3 was the alternative when 20...f5 looks logical, although Black might also have been tempted by the positional pawn sacrifice 20...c4!? 21 bxc4 Nc5) 20...Ng4 21 Bxg7 Kxg7 22 e4 Qf6 23 Rc1 Qd4+ 24 Kh1 Ndf6 (the prophylactic 24...h5!? was also strong: Black can then both attack e4 and prepare to break with ...c4) 25 Qe2 Nxe4! 26 Qxg4 Nd2 27 Nf2 (after 27 Rg1? f5 28 Qh4 Nxb3 29 Rb1 Nd2 30 Rb2 c4 Black's queenside pawns would have been set to sweep all before them) 27...Nxf1 28 Rxf1 Re3 29 Qd7 Rae8 when Black's control of the e-file and active major pieces gave him the advantage in V.Burmakin-J.Degraeve, Koszalin 1999.



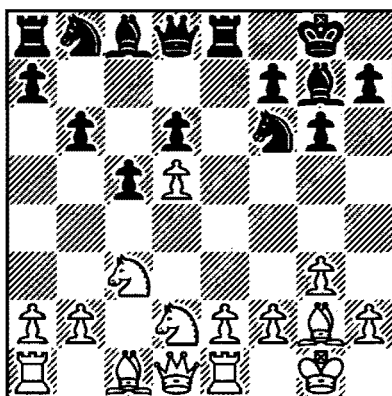
**Diagram 4 (W)**



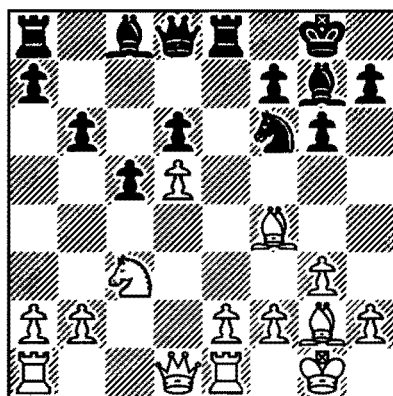
**Diagram 5 (W)**

Going back to the position after 13...a6, White might see Black's trick coming and so try 14 Qh4!?, but with his queenside pawns mobile and his light-squared bishop gone, Black is also far from unhappy here. I.Mizinov-A.Zuev, Ulyanovsk 2007, continued 14...b5 15 Bg5 Nbd7 16 Rae1 b4 17 Ne4 h6! 18 Nxf6+ Bxf6 19 Bxf6 Qxf6 20 Qxf6 Nxf6 21 e4 c4 (**Diagram 5**) 22 f3 (22 f4 is a more active try, but then Black can consider, as well as 22...Nd7 23 Rc1 Nb6, 22...Rad8!?, preparing to swap the c-pawn for White's e-pawn) 22...Rac8 23 Bh3 Rc5 24 Rc1 Re7, which left White on the defensive in the ending.

Returning to 11 Re1 (**Diagram 6**):



**Diagram 6 (B)**



**Diagram 7 (W)**

## 11...Nbd7!?

Continuing the semi-waiting game as Radjabov wants to see how Aronian intends to develop his pieces. However, as we will see below, there's also nothing wrong with the straightforward 11...Ba6.

## 12 h3

Maintaining the tension. The alternative was 12 Nc4 Ne5 13 Nxe5 Rxe5, but Black should be fine here, not least because the exchange of knights has eased any slight cramp in his position:

a) 14 Bf4 Re8 (**Diagram 7**) 15 Qc1 (White would like to go after d6, but 15 Nb5?! runs into 15...Ne4! 16 Bxe4 Rxe4, as pointed out by Emms, when both 17 Nxd6? Rxf4 18 gxf4 Qxd6 and 17 Bxd6? a6 18 Nc7 Ra7 lose material) 15...a6 16 a4 Rb8 17 Bh6 Bh8!? (Black has a pawn sacrifice in mind, but there was also nothing wrong with the straightforward 17...b5: for example, 18 Bxg7 Kxg7 19 axb5 axb5 20 Qf4 Qe7 21 Ra5 Bd7 and White lacks a good way to generate any real queenside pressure) 18 Bg5 Qc7 19 Qf4 Ng4 20 h3 h6 21 Bxh6 Nxh6 22 Qxh6 b5 23 axb5 axb5 24

Rab1 Bg7 25 Qf4 Be5 26 Qh4 Kg7 gave Black full positional compensation for the pawn in V.Nedilko-V.Stets, Alushta 2005.

b) 14 e4 Re8 highlights a not uncommon problem for White after an exchange of pieces in the Fianchetto Benoni: just what is his plan? After, say, 15 h3 (prophylaxis; alternatively, 15 Bf4 is a little planless and 15...Ng4 16 h3 Ne5 17 Qd2 Ba6 already looks promising for Black, while 15 f4 Bg4!? 16 Bf3 Qd7 is an interesting idea to hold up e4-e5: 17 e5?! Bxf3 18 Qxf3 Rad8! 19 exf6? Rxe1+ 20 Kf2 Rde8 21 fxe7 Qh3 gives Black an overwhelming attack) 15...Bd7 16 f4 Nh5 (**Diagram 8**) White's ambitious central expansion has only helped Black to find counterplay, and 17 g4? (17 Kh2 improves, but then Black has at least 17...f5 18 exf5 Rxe1 19 Qxe1 gxf5 with good play: White's expansion has been halted, but Black's queenside majority hasn't) 17...Bd4+ 18 Kh2 Qh4! 19 gxh5 Bf2 quickly whips up a strong attack. White can sacrifice his queen, but I'd prefer to play with the queen and pawns rather than the three minor pieces after 20 Rf1 Bxh3 21 Rxf2 Bg4+ 22 Kg1 Bxd1 23 Nxd1 Qxh5.

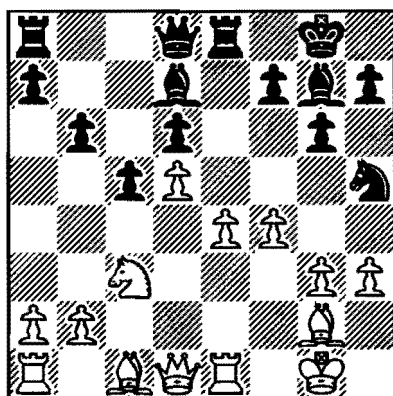


Diagram 8 (W)

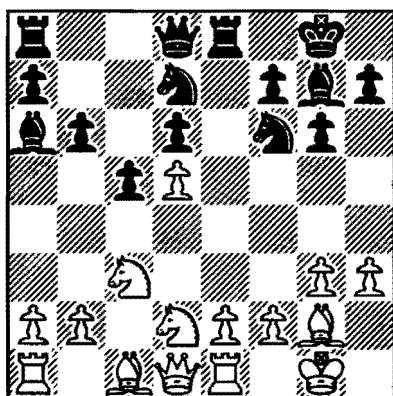


Diagram 9 (W)

### 12...Ba6 (Diagram 9)

Having induced White to spend a tempo on h3, Radjabov is happy to finally activate his light-squared bishop.

### 13 Qa4

The idea behind 12 h3. Instead 13 a4 would transpose to a position already reached in tournament praxis. Black has tried a number of ideas here, but surprisingly not 13...Qe7!? (I'm grateful to John Emms for drawing my attention to this logical move; unfortunately seemingly more aggressive tries don't fully convince, such as 13...Nh5 14 Nb5 Bxb5 15 axb5 f5?! which ran into the powerful counter 16

e4! f4 17 g4 Nh6 18 Nf3! Nxe4 19 Ra4 Nef6 20 Bxf4 in J.Jirka-R.Wojtaszek, Cartak 2004, although Black can also consider 13...Rc8 14 Nb5 Bxb5 15 axb5 Qc7 16 Nc4 Ne5 17 Nxe5 Rxe5 18 f4 Ree8 19 e4 c4 20 Kh2 Nd7 which led to a pretty complex struggle in I.Dolguševa-E.Pakhomova, Novosibirsk 2007) 14 Nb5 (White can't really delay this because of the weakness of the d3-square: Emms notes the attractive lines 14 Qc2 Ne5 15 b3? Nd3! and 14 Rb1 Bd3!?) 14...Ne5!? (Black usually exchanges on b5, but here he doesn't have to; that said, 14...Bxb5 15 axb5 Ne5 16 Qc2 Nh5 17 e4 Rac8 18 Ra4 Rc7 is also possible, tempting White's pawns forward) 15 Qc2 Bb7 (**Diagram 10**) 16 f4! (taking up the challenge is critical; alternatively, 16 e4?! a6 17 Nc3 c4 homes in on d3 and so too does 16 Nc3 c4 17 f4? Nd3) 16...Nxd5!? (sacrificing a piece; 16...Ned7 is also very playable when White should avoid 17 Nc7? Qe3+ 18 Kh2 Qf2 19 Rf1 Qxe2 20 Nxe8 Rxe8, with superb play for the exchange, but 17 Nc4 Nxd5 18 Nbx6 Nb4 19 Qb3 Bxg2 20 Kxg2 is somewhat more challenging, albeit far from clear after 20...Red8 21 e4 Qe6!?, preventing 22 e5? due to the various pins after 22...Nxe5!) 17 Bxd5 Bxd5 18 fxe5 Bxe5 (**Diagram 11**) which leads to quite a fascinating situation. Black already has two pawns for the piece, not to mention a raking bishop-pair. Play might continue 19 Qd3 (covering g3 and avoiding 19 Ra3?! a6 20 Nc3? Bd4+ 21 Kh2 Qe3 with a crushing attack; note too White's problems after 19 e4 Bxg3 20 Rf1 Bc6 when he cannot move his knight from d2 and ...Qh4 is on the way) 19...Be6 20 Nc4! (this forcing idea looks like the best defence) 20...Bxc4 21 Qxc4 Bxg3 22 Rf1 when White should have enough counterplay. Perhaps Black might now try 22...Be5!?, when 23 Rf3 Rad8 24 Nc3 Bd4+ 25 e3 looks like a critical and still rather unclear line, since 22...Qxe2 23 Qxf7+ Kh8 24 Qf6+ forces perpetual.

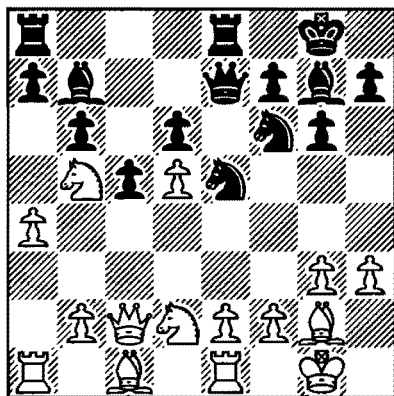


Diagram 10 (W)

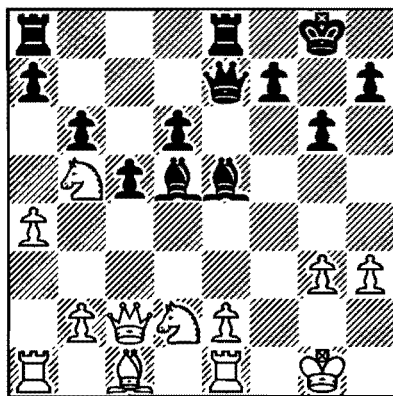


Diagram 11 (W)

13...Bd3! (**Diagram 12**)

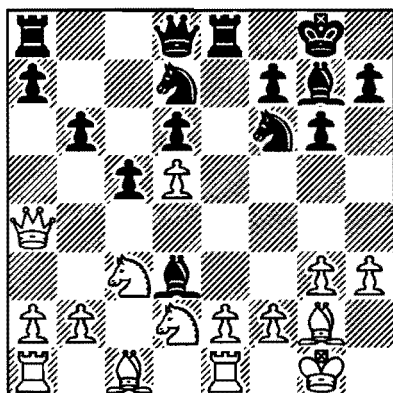


Diagram 12 (W)

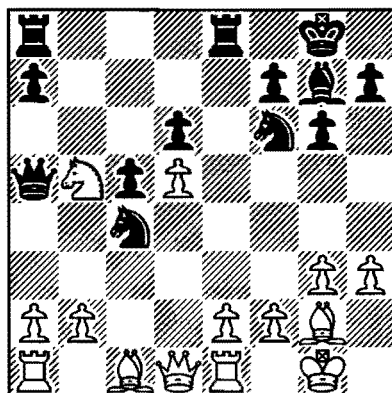


Diagram 13 (W)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Radjabov has no intention of retreating and prepares to advance his b-pawn. Who'd have thought that Black's light-squared bishop could be so active after just 13 moves of a Modern Benoni?

#### 14 Nf1 b5 15 Qd1!

Best. White chases the bishop, although Radjabov has calculated that it cannot be trapped. Instead 15 Nxb5 Nb6 16 Qa5 Nbx d5! 17 Qxd8 Raxd8 18 Nxa7 Rxe2 19 Rxe2 Bxe2 looks at least okay for Black with his active pieces.

#### 15...Bc4 16 Nd2

The alternative 16 Ne3 Nb6 is likely to transpose. White might try instead 17 a4, but after 17...b4 18 a5 Rxe3! 19 Bxe3 bxc3 20 axb6 cxb2 Black's advanced b-pawn supplies plenty of compensation for the exchange.

#### 16...Nb6!

Continuing in active vein. However, Black didn't have to sacrifice a pawn and 16...Rb8 17 a4 a6 18 axb5 axb5 was a reasonable alternative since 19 Qc2 Ne5 continues to prevent the bishop from being trapped.

#### 17 Nxc4 Nxc4! 18 Nxb5 Qa5 (Diagram 13) 19 a4

White's position is already rather unenviable. Indeed, the alternative 19 Nc3?! Rab8 20 Qc2 Nd7 (Emms) looks good for Black: White can't easily develop his dark-squared bishop and, once again, ...Na3 is very much an option.

#### 19...Nd7?

A little slow and now Black loses the initiative. As first pointed out by Emms in his *ChessPublishing.com* column, Black should have continued going forwards with

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

19...Ne4! when it remains tricky for White to unravel: for example, 20 Rb1 (or 20 Ra2 Rab8! and now White might well have to make an undesirable exchange on e4, if only to avoid 21 b3?! Rxb5 22 bxc4 Rb1) 20...a6 21 Na3 Nxa3 22 bxa3 c4 and, having wrecked White's queenside and generated a passed pawn, Black retains plenty of compensation.

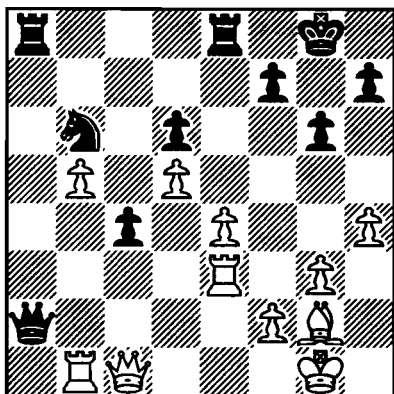
**20 Bf4! Bxb2 21 Rb1 Be5 22 Qc1!**

White has returned the pawn to finally develop his dark-squared bishop and now Radjabov finds himself the one under pressure.

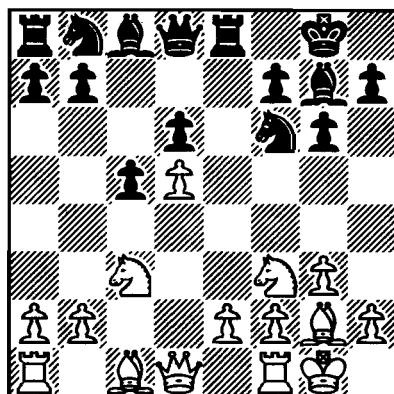
**22...a6?**

Now Black gets rolled over by some impressive power chess from Aronian. Instead 22...Bxf4 23 gxf4 a6 (23...Nd2!? 24 Nxd6 Nxb1 25 Nxe8 Rxe8 26 Qxb1 Qxa4 is also possible with quite a mess: Black's queenside pawns might be split, but they are passed) 24 Qxc4 axb5 25 axb5 Nb6 would have kept Black very much in the game: ...c4 or ...Na4 will follow.

**23 Qxc4 axb5 24 axb5 Nb6 25 Qc1 c4 26 Bxe5 Rxe5 27 e4 Ree8 28 Re3 Qa2 29 h4! (Diagram 14)**



**Diagram 14 (B)**



**Diagram 15 (W)**

Having halted the c-pawn, Aronian turns his attention to the black monarch.

**29...Nd7 30 Rc3 Nb6 31 h5 Re5 32 h6 f5 33 exf5 Rxf5 34 Rc2 Qa3 35 Qd2 Qc5 36 Bh3 Rf3 37 Rc3 Rf6 38 Be6+ Kh8 39 Re3 Raf8 40 Qb2 Na4 41 Qa3!**

Accurately calculated as Aronian finishes clinically.

**41...Rxf2 42 Qxc5 dxc5 43 Ra3 Nb6**

White's main point was that 43...c3 44 Rxa4 c2 45 Rc1 Rf1+ 46 Rxf1 Rxf1+ 47 Kg2! allows Black to queen, but only at the cost of mate on the back rank.



**44 Rd1 R2f6 45 Rda1 g5 46 Ra6 c3 47 Rxb6 c2 48 Rc6 1-0**

A convincing display from Aronian, but only once he'd obtained the initiative. The early middlegame certainly belonged to Black and 10...b6 clearly deserves further attention.

## Looking A Little Deeper

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 (Diagram 15)**

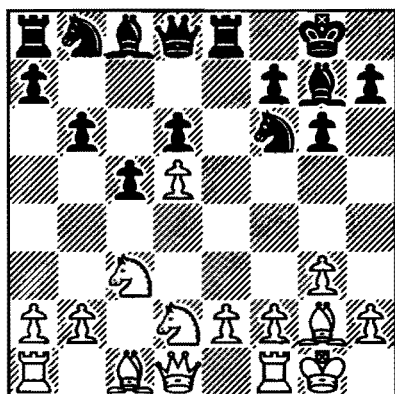
We will now consider White's most popular choice, 10 Nd2, before mapping out a mini and fairly dynamic repertoire for Black against the alternatives:

**A: 10 Nd2**

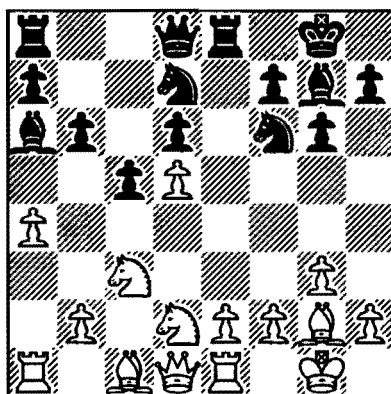
**B: 10 Bf4 et al**

Before getting down to business, it's worth pointing out that those who liked Radjabov's approach shouldn't try and put it into action a move earlier. After 9...b6 10 Bf4 White has a good chance of emerging with an edge, as he did with 10...Ba6 11 a4 Qc7 12 Re1 Nbd7 13 h3 Ne8 14 Qc2 Qb7 15 e4 in E.Bacrot-C.Derieux, Ajaccio (blitz) 2007. I much prefer to first insert the useful move 9...Re8, only fianchettoing in the main line (10 Nd2), while remaining flexible against White's other set-ups.

**A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 10 Nd2 b6 (Diagram 16)**



**Diagram 16 (W)**



**Diagram 17 (W)**

### 11 a4

The main line, inasmuch as there is one against 10...b6. Instead we saw in the notes to Aronian-Radjabov that 11 Nc4 Ba6 merely plays into Black's hands.

After White's main alternative, 11 Re1, Radjabov opted for 11...Nbd7, but more usual has been 11...Ba6, after which 12 a4 (12 Qa4 tries to interfere with Black's development, but 12...Qd7 – 12...b5!? 13 Nxb5 Qd7 14 Nc3 Qxa4 15 Nxa4 Nbd7!? 16 Nc3 Rab8 is an ambitious Benko-like alternative – 13 Qxd7 Nbx d7 gives Black quite easy play, as shown by both 14 Nde4 Nxe4 15 Nxe4 Nf6!, Am.Lopez-R.Juarez Flores, Guatemala 1990, and the 14 a4 Ne5 15 Nf3 Nc4 of S.Seiler-N.Nuesken, Kelbra 2006) 12...Nbd7 (**Diagram 17**) has seen White try a number of alternatives to the principled 13 Nb5:

a) 13 e4?! Ne5 immediately focusses on the weakened d3-square.

b) 13 Nde4 Nxe4 14 Nxe4 Ne5!? (14...Nf6 15 Bg5 h6 16 Nxf6+ Bxf6 17 Bxf6 Qxf6 is a simple equalizer) 15 Bg5 f6 16 Bd2 Bb7 17 Bc3 f5 18 Nd2 Qc7 19 Qc2 Qf7! prepared to expand on the kingside in A.Raulet-J.Delmont, Champagne Ardenne 2001.

c) 13 Rb1 Qe7 14 Nb5 Ne5 15 Qb3 Rac8 16 Nc4 Nxc4 17 Qxc4 Nd7 18 Bd2 Ne5 19 Qb3 Qd7 saw Black comfortably holding his own in a manoeuvring struggle in P.Stempin-R.Wojtaszek, Lubniewice 2003.

d) 13 h3 transposes to the notes to White's 13th move in Aronian-Radjabov.

e) 13 Nb5 Bxb5 14 axb5 Qc7! (this both covers a7 and supports a later ...c4 push; the alternative is 14...Re7, after which 15 Ra4 Ne8 16 Nc4 Ne5 17 Nxe5 Bxe5 18 Qb3 Qd7 19 e3 Nc7 20 Bf1 f5 21 Bd2 Bg7 22 Rea1 Ne8 was perhaps a little passive but also extremely solid for Black in E.Postny-V.Laznicka, online blitz 2006) 15 Qb3 (15 Qc2 might be met in the same manner with 15...Ne5, but in M.Bellegotti-B.Sandstroem, correspondence 2003, Black came up with a more direct concept: 15...a6!? 16 bxa6 b5 17 b4 – even this fails to trouble Black, but 17...Qb6 is next up in any case – 17...Qb6 18 Bb2 Rxa6 19 Rxa6 Qxa6 20 Ra1 Qb6 21 e3 Ng4 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 Qb2+ Kg8 24 Ne4 Nge5 and Black was fine) 15...Ne5 (with White's queen now in touch with b5, Black cannot equalize à la Sandstroem and should prefer to rearrange his knights) 16 Ra4 Nfd7 (**Diagram 18**) 17 h3 (and not 17 e4? c4 18 Qc2 Nc5 followed by an invasion on d3) 17...c4! 18 Qd1 Nc5 19 Ra3 Nb7 was at least equal for Black in V.Burmakin-E.Pigusov, Russian Championship, St Petersburg 1998: White remains a little cramped and troubled by the presence of the c4-pawn, while Black can consider blocking the a-file with ...Na5, followed by breaking with ...a6.

### 11...Ba6

To date nobody has tried to delay this, just like Radjabov did against 11 Re1, but once again 11...Nbd7!? is an option, albeit one likely to simply transpose after 12 Nb5 (12 Nc4 Ne5 again equalizes in view of the familiar trick 13 Nxe5 Rxe5 14 Bf4 Re8 15 Nb5?! Ne4!) 12...Ba6.

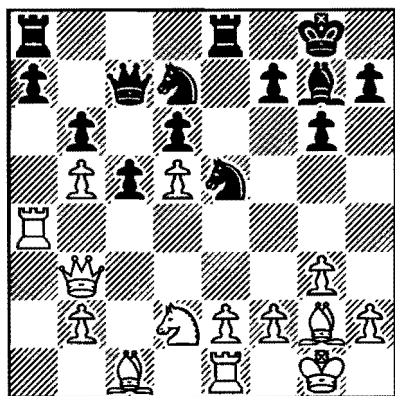
### 12 Nb5

**The** most direct approach, but not the only one: 12 Re1 would transpose to the notes to White's 11th move.

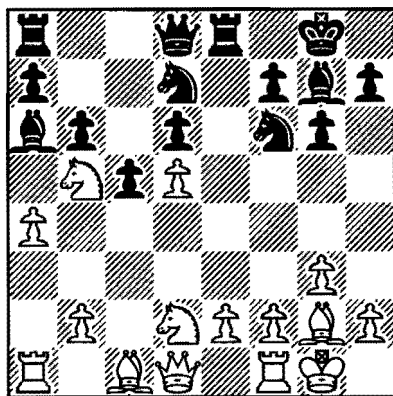
**12...Nbd7! (Diagram 19) 13 Nc4**

**Continuing** to target d6, but White might once again prefer to debate note 'e' to his 11th move with 13 Re1.

**13...Bxb5**



**Diagram 18 (W)**



**Diagram 19 (W)**

**Essential** as the d6-pawn has to be preserved. Now White once again gains some pressure down the a-file, but his pieces don't appear especially well co-ordinated, at least not in the short term.

**14 axb5 Ne5 15 Nxe5**

**More** critical than 15 Na3 a6! when Black solves his main problem (the weakness of the a7-pawn) to obtain a comfortable position. White then had to play quite ambitiously in R.Gervasio-A.Glicenstein, Paris 2003, but 16 f4!? Neg4 17 Nc4 Qc7 (17...axb5!? 18 Rxa8 Qxa8 19 Nxd6 Rd8 20 Nxb5 Nxd5 is a risky alternative; the long diagonal is opened for the g2-bishop, but from what I can see White can't exploit this factor) 18 h3?! axb5 19 Rxa8 Rxa8 20 Na3 b4 21 Nc2 Nh6 22 g4 Nd7 23 e4 f6 didn't give him enough for his pawn.

**15...Rxe5 (Diagram 20)**

Following quite a logical sequence, we reach a position which has been debated in a couple of grandmaster games. White will look to play on the queenside, but Black should be happy to have exchanged two pairs of minor pieces and I wholly agree with co-author Emms's verdict (from NCO) that Black is fine here.

**16 Qd3**

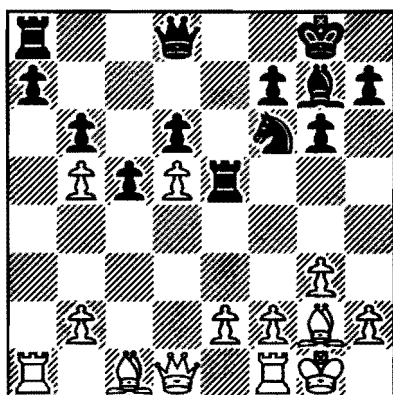


Diagram 20 (W)

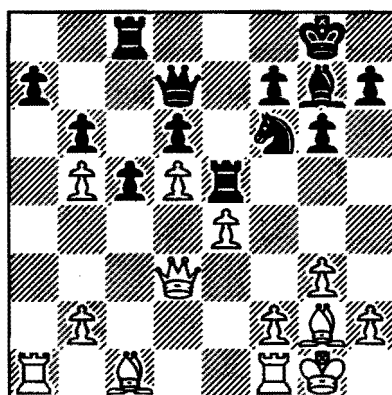


Diagram 21 (W)

The rook can also be driven backwards, but 16 Bf4 Re7 17 Qd3 (keeping the knight out of e4; White doesn't have to, but after 17 Bf3 Ne4 18 Ra4 Qe8 19 Qb3 Bd4 20 Qc2 f5 Black had a decent Leningrad-like set-up in L.Seres-A.Meszaros, Szekszard 1995) 17...Qd7 18 Bf3 Ne8! (preparing to target b5, and thereby forcing White into action on the queenside; I like this plan, although a decent case could also be made for 18...Ng4!?, followed by 19...Ne5) 19 Rab1 Nc7 20 b4 (the only way to save the pawn) 20...Rb8 21 bxc5?! (after this I haven't been able to find a way for White to generate enough compensation for the pawn; perhaps 21 Rb3!? is a better try, with the idea of 21...Nxb5 22 bxc5 bxc5 23 Bxd6!, but Black has some superior options, including 21...Be5) 21...bxc5 22 Rfc1 Ree8 23 e4 Nxb5 saw the b5-pawn rounded up and left Black better in M.Quinteros-J.Granda Zuniga, Mar del Plata 1993.

## 16...Re7!?

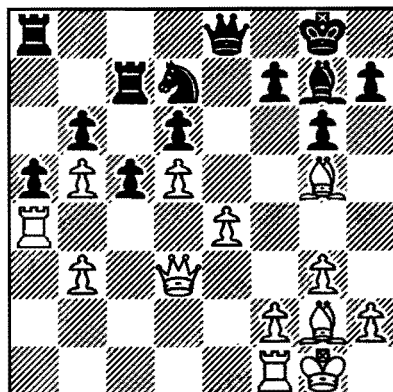
A prophylactic retreat, placing the rook on a safe square and preparing to swing the queen behind it. It's also an improvement over 16...Re8 17 Bd2 Ng4 18 Ra4 Ne5 19 Qb3 Qc7 20 Bc3! c4 21 Qb4 Qc5 22 Rfa1 when, for once, White had managed to generate some decent queenside pressure in O.Panno-M.Leskovar Raimondi, Mar del Plata 2000.

Inside many great works are hidden little nuggets and thus we find mention of 10...b6 in John Watson's *The Gambit Guide to the Modern Benoni*. He only gives one variation (leading to this very position) and then suggests 16...Qd7!? 17 e4 Rc8 (**Diagram 21**) which is not dissimilar to our main line. Black threatens 18...c4 and after 18 Ra4 the rooks can be regrouped with 18...Ree8, followed by ...Rc7 and ...Rec8.

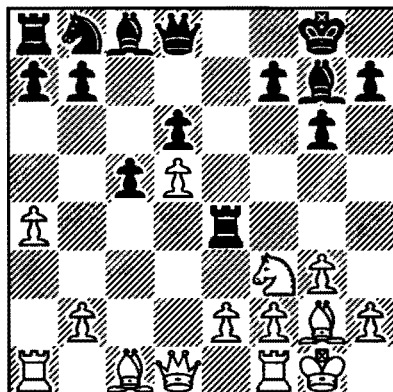
## 17 e4 Qe8! 18 Ra4

Now Black gets to seal the a-file, but he shouldn't have any problems in any case, as shown by both 18 Re1 Ng4 19 Bg5 Bd4 20 Re2 f6 and 18 Bf4? Nxe4 19 Bxe4 Rxe4 20 Bxd6 Rd4.

**18...a5 19 Bg5 Rc7 20 b3! Nd7 (Diagram 22)**



**Diagram 22 (W)**



**Diagram 23 (W)**

It's not easy for either side to make progress, and the high-level correspondence game M.Ruemmele-C.Sender, correspondence 2001, was shortly agreed drawn. Black rarely meets 10 Nd2 with 10...b6, but this easy-to-employ approach looks like a clean equalizer, whether or not White flicks in Re1.

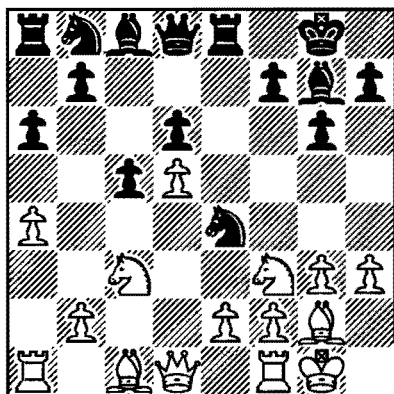
**B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 g3 Bg7 8 Bg2 0-0 9 0-0 Re8 10 Bf4**

White's main alternative to 10 Nd2, eyeing d6 and preventing 10...Nbd7, but he also has:

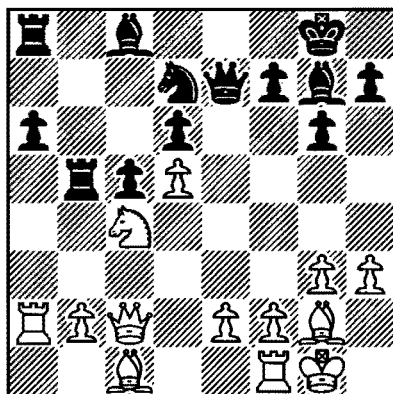
a) 10 a4 just looks a little premature, since playing for ...b5 is by no means Black's only aim. A good response is 10...Ne4! 11 Nxe4 Rxe4 (**Diagram 23**) when the long diagonal opens and White might well regret weakening the b4-square. M.Jukic-A.Shabalov, Geneva 1992, continued 12 Bg5 (12 Nd2 should probably be met by the prudent 12...Re8 since 12...Rb4!? 13 Ra2! Nd7?! – the exchange sacrifice 13...Na6 14 b3 Rd4 15 Bb2 Nb4! 16 Ra3 Qe7 looks like a better try – 14 b3 Ne5 15 Ba3 Rd4 16 Bb2 Rb4 17 Qa1! was awkward for Black in H.Lieb-G.Hartmann, German League 1989) 12...Qf8 13 Nd2 Rb4 14 Ra2 h6 15 Be3 Nd7 16 Qc1 b6 17 Ne4 Ba6 with active and promising play, not least due to Black's superior bishops.

b) 10 h3 is probably a better attempt to reach the main lines after 10...a6 11 a4 Nbd7 12 Nd2. However, Black can again play independently and 10...a6 (flicking

in ...a6 and a4 before going ...Ne4 has pros and cons – the b4-square becomes available for Black's rook; White can defend b2 from the side with Ra2 – but I feel that Black should here, not least because the logical sequence 10...Ne4 11 Nxe4 Rxe4 12 Bg5! Qc7 13 Nd2 Re8 14 Bf4! Nd7 15 Nc4 Ne5 16 Nxe5 Bxe5 17 Bxe5 Rxe5 18 e4, as in G.Kuzmin-S.Bouaziz, Riga Interzonal 1979, is not at all easy to improve on) 11 a4 Ne4 (**Diagram 24**) 12 Nxe4 (White usually exchanges; he doesn't have to, but 12 Ra3 Nd7 13 Qc2 Ndf6 14 Nh4 Nxc3 15 bxc3 c4! gives Black decent counter-play, as was especially the case following the thematic exchange sacrifice 16 a5 b5 17 axb6 Qxb6 18 Be3? Rxe3! 19 fxe3 Qxe3+ 20 Kh2 Nh5 21 Rf3 Qe7 in E.Horvath-M.Marin, Budapest 1990) 12...Rxe4 gives us a further divide:



**Diagram 24 (W)**



**Diagram 25 (W)**

b1) 13 Nd2 (by some margin the most popular choice) 13...Rb4 14 Qc2 (White might also go after the b4-rook with 14 Ra2, preparing b3 and Ba3; Black has then done OK with the gambit 14...b5 15 axb5 Nd7, and I should also draw attention to the 14...Nd7 15 b3 a5!? of D.Housieux-J.Degraeve, Le Touquet 2005, when the critical variation 16 Ba3 b5! 17 Bxb4 axb4 18 Qc2 bxa4 19 Rxa4 Rxa4 20 bxa4 Ba6 offers Black full compensation for the exchange, especially with the white rook lacking an active role) 14...Nd7 15 Ra2 b5! (making good use of the rook's active location to waste no time in opening queenside lines) 16 axb5 Rxb5 17 Nc4 Qe7 (**Diagram 25**) was fine for Black in R.Martyn-S.Gordon, British Championship, Scarborough 2004, before another powerful exchange sacrifice turned the game slightly in his favour: 18 Re1 Nb6!? 19 Na3?! Rb4 20 Bd2 Bd7! 21 Bxb4 cxb4 22 Nb1 Bb5 23 Nd2 a5 with free-flowing and good play.

b2) 13 Ra3 Nd7 14 Nd2 Re8 (solid, but 14...Rb4!? 15 b3 b5 16 axb5 Rxb5 is also possible) 15 Nc4 Nb6 was fine for Black in the elite game R.Hübner-M.Tal, Montreal 1979.

**b3**) 13 Bg5 was critical without ...a6 and a4 included, and has also been tried here by Kuzmin. However, b4 is now a stable outpost and 13...Qc7! (Black might also wish to consider the critical 13...Qe8!? 14 Nd2 Rb4 when 15 b3! is very much an option, offering an exchange for dangerous play on the dark squares) 14 Qd2 (the rook no longer has to retreat after 14 Nd2 and 14...Rb4 15 Ra2 Nd7 followed by ...Ne5 and arranging ...b5 should generate reasonable counterplay) 14...Rb4 15 Ra2 Nd7 16 b3 Rb8 gave Black good play on the queenside in G.Sosonko-L.Galego, Novi Sad Olympiad 1990.

**c**) 10 Re1 echoes Black's last move, but playing for an early e2-e4 is rarely considered critical. Indeed, I would be tempted to switch to a standard set-up with 10...a6 11 a4 Nbd7 since the active 12 e4 c4! is considered to give Black a good game. However, Black can also play along the lines of variations 'a' and 'b', and 10...Ne4!? (played immediately because 10...a6 11 e4 b5?! 12 e5! is awkward; following 12...dxe5 13 Nxe5 Bb7 14 Bg5 Nbd7 15 Nc6 Rxe1+ 16 Qxe1 Black was struggling in V.Moskalenko-J.Emms, Copenhagen 1995, but 11...Nbd7 improves, with the idea of 12 Bf4 Ng4!) 11 Nxe4 (White should very rarely cede his dark-squared bishop for a knight in the Modern Benoni, and here is no exception: 11 Bd2?! Nxd2 12 Qxd2?! Nd7 13 e4 a6 14 a4 Rb8 15 Rab1 Qa5 16 Qc2 b5 was already heading towards something of a massacre, especially for a postal game, in P.Kellner-A.Korelov, correspondence 1969) 11...Rxe4 12 Bg5 Qf8 (an interesting idea; Black gives himself ideas of doubling on the long diagonal and of expanding on the kingside) 13 Nd2 Rg4!? 14 Bf4 g5 (**Diagram 26**) 15 Be3! (wise; 15 h3 gxf4 16 hxg4 fxg3 17 fxg3 Bxb2 18 Rb1 Bc3 – Watson – leaves White's position riddled with holes) 15...Bxb2 16 Rb1 was seen in Y.Razuvaev-M.Chiburdanidze, USSR Championship, Tashkent 1980. Now I rather like Watson's suggestion of 16...Bd4!?, intending 17 h3 Bxe3 18 hxg4 Bd4 19 e3 Bg7 with decent long-term compensation on the queenside for the exchange.

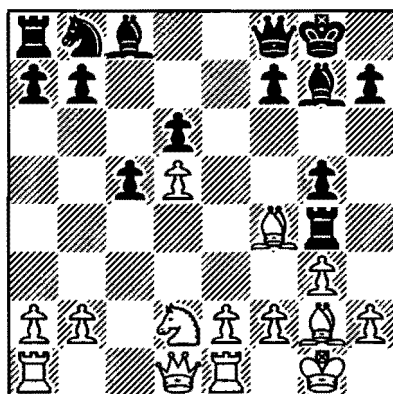


Diagram 26 (W)

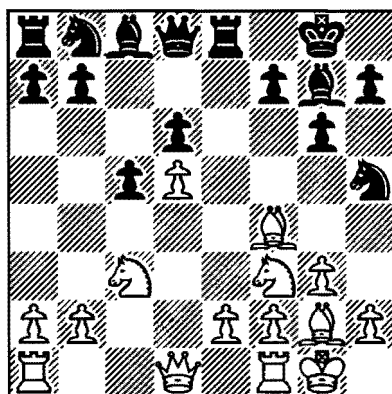


Diagram 27 (W)

Returning to 10 Bf4:

## 10...Nh5!? (Diagram 27)

'The most reliable move' according to John Nunn back in 1982. This destabilizing approach has become a little neglected since then, but is still very playable. Black might also play by analogy with the variations above. However, I must confess that I'm not wholly convinced by either 10...Ne4 11 Nxe4 Rxe4 12 Nd2 Rb4 13 b3! or 10...a6 11 a4 Ne4 12 Nxe4 Rxe4 13 Nd2 Rb4 14 Ra2!, despite Watson's persuasive arguments for them. However, the reader may be happy with one of these (14...g5 15 Be3 f5 is a critical follow-up to the latter) and should see Watson's aforementioned and highly recommended work for details.

## 11 Bg5

The critical and usual choice. Otherwise White risks landing up in knots and 11 Be3 Na6!? 12 Nd2 Bd7 13 Bf3 Bh3 14 Re1 led to 14...Rxe3! 15 fxe3 Qg5 which was a standard and fairly effective exchange sacrifice in D.D'Israel-J.Oliveira, Sao Paulo 2007.

## 11...Qb6

The most ambitious choice, but preparing ...b5 with Smyslov's 11...Qd7!? (Diagram 28) is also reasonable:

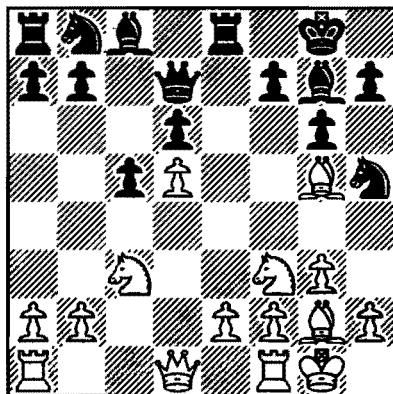


Diagram 28 (W)

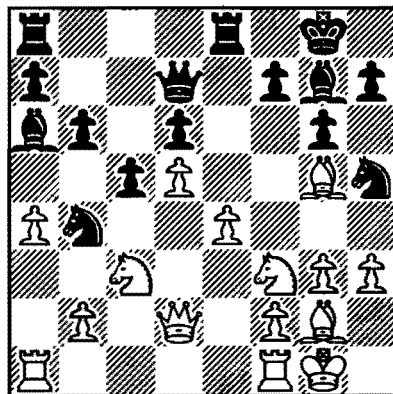


Diagram 29 (W)

a) 12 e4 b5 13 Re1 b4 14 Na4 Na6 (as pointed out by Ugrinovic, Black should probably flick in 14...h6!? 15 Bd2 before going 15...Na6 and playing à la Smyslov) 15 h3 (Ugrinovic gives the line 15 Nd2!? h6 16 Be3 Nc7 17 Nc4 Ba6 18 Rc1 Bxc4 19 Rxc4 Nf6 20 f3; I'm not certain that this is so bad for Black with the a4-knight stuck out on a limb, but would prefer to avoid this slightly static possibility) 15...Bb7 16 a3 Nf6 17 Nd2! Nxd5!? 18 exd5 Rxe1+ 19 Qxe1 Qxa4 20 Qe7 Bxb2 led to intense



but roughly level complications in G.Sosonko-V.Smyslov, Tilburg 1977.

b) 12 Qd2 b5 13 a3!? Bb7 14 b4 a5! ripped open the queenside to supply sufficient counterplay in I.Hausner-L.Klima, Czech League 2006.

c) 12 a4 (a much more solid approach) 12...b6! 13 Qd2 Na6 14 h3 (Black obtained good counterplay after 14 Rfe1 Nb4 15 h3 Ba6 16 g4 Nf6 17 e4 Nd3 18 Re3 c4 in T.Shumiakina-O.Zimina, Sochi 2004) 14...Nb4 15 e4 Ba6 (**Diagram 29**) 16 Rfd1 Qc7 was comfortable for Black in E.Gleizerov-T.Wedberg, Osterskars 1995. Once again White's set-up with e2-e4 isn't too dangerous.

## 12 Qc1

Theory has generally considered this idea of Lev Alburt's to be more challenging than the straightforward 12 Qd2 which prevents the f3-knight from using the d2-square. Thus Black can consider, as well 12...Nd7, both 12...Na6!? (after which 13 h3 f6! 14 Be3 f5 15 Rab1 Bd7 16 Bh6 Bh8 gave Black a reasonable set-up in Livanov-A.Kapengut, USSR 1979: Black has ideas of ...c4, as well as of doubling on the e-file) and 12...Bg4!? (**Diagram 30**).

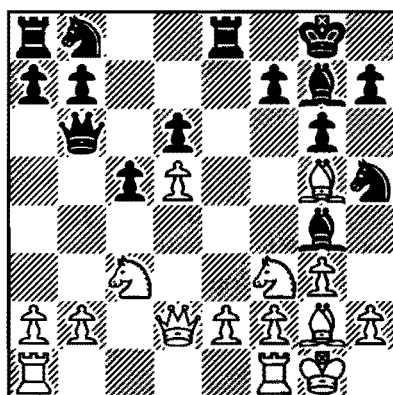


Diagram 30 (W)

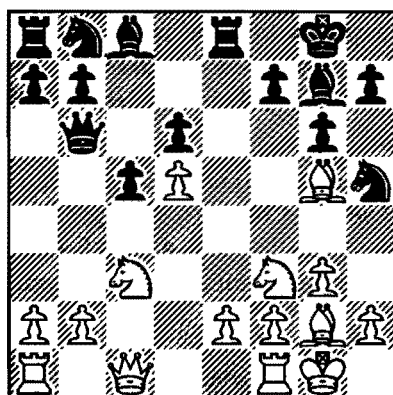


Diagram 31 (B)

The latter is an idea we will also consider against 12 Qc1, and here 13 Nh4!? (critical, whereas 13 h3 Bxf3 14 Bxf3 Nf6 should be OK for Black, who has traded off his oft-problematic bishop, and 15 e4?! Nbd7 16 Bg2 a6 17 Rac1 Qa5 18 Bf4 b5! left White worse in G.Ligterink-L.Psakhis, European Team Championship, Plovdiv 1983) 13...Na6! (13...Bxc3?! 14 Qxc3 Bxe2 15 Rfe1 is probably too risky for Black, especially since 15...Nd7 16 Bh3 f5 17 Bxf5! gxf5 18 Nxf5 Kf7 19 Rxe2! Rxe2 20 Qf3 Qxb2 21 Qxh5+ Kg8 22 Rf1 gives White a huge attack for the exchange) 14 h3 Bc8 (keeping the d7-square available for a knight, and avoiding 14...Bd7?! 15 g4! Nf6 16 Qf4) should be equal according to Psakhis. It's hard to disagree with that as-

essment, not least because advancing with e2-e4 will always be a risky business for White due to the option of ...c4 and ...Nc5.

Returning to 12 Qc1 (**Diagram 31**):

**12...Nd7**

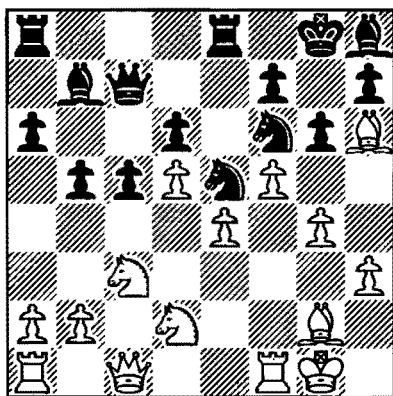


**BEWARE! Black must realize the difference between 12 Qc1 and 12 Qd2. Thus against the former, he should avoid 12...Na6?! 13 Bh6 Bh8?! 14 Nd2! Nc7 15 Bf3 Nf6 16 Nc4 Qa6 17 Qf4 which already left him in huge trouble in L.Alburt-D.Gurevich, US Championship, Estes Park 1985.**

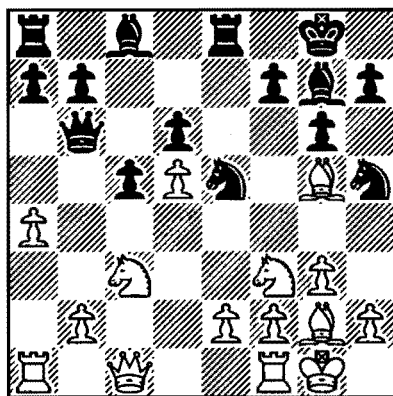
The text is somewhat more respectable, but I should also mention the new try 12...Bg4!?. Certainly 13 Bh6 Bxf3 14 Bxf3 Nf6 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 Rb1 Nbd7 illustrated Black's main aim in A.Cioara-Z.Hracek, German League 2007. The double minor piece exchange gives Black a fairly pleasant set-up and he will look to advance with ...b5 (after ...a6 and ...Qa5). Instead 13 Nh4 Na6! prepares to capture on e2, but 13 Nd2! is more critical. Indeed, I haven't then been able to find a route to clear equality for Black: for example, 13...h6 (I'm not convinced by 13...Qa6?! 14 e4 Nf6 15 h3 and even less so by 13...Bxe2?! 14 Nxe2 Rxe2 15 Nc4 Qa6 16 Bf3! Re8 17 Bxh5 gxh5 18 Qf4) 14 Be3 Nf6 15 h3 Bd7 16 a4 is probably a little better for White.

**13 a4!?**

White must again beware becoming too ambitious and, for example, 13 Bh6 Bh8 14 h3 a6 15 g4 Nh6 16 Nd2 Qc7 17 f4? b5 18 f5 Bb7 19 e4 Ne5 (**Diagram 32**) forced White to go all-in in L.Alburt-S.Kudrin, Hastings 1983/84, but as the game showed Black has sufficient defensive resources and is objectively doing quite well here.



**Diagram 32 (W)**



**Diagram 33 (W)**

I should also mention that 13 Re1 has actually been White's most popular move in the limited practice thus far, but 13...a6 (13...Ne5 14 Nxe5 Rxe5 15 e4 Bd7 is a solid alternative) 14 Rb1 Qc7 15 Bh6 Bh8 16 a4 Rb8 17 e4 b5 gave Black reasonable counterplay in J.Akesson-T.Ernst, Swedish Championship, Gothenburg 2006.

### **13...Ne5! (Diagram 33)**

A new idea. Instead 13...c4?! 14 Be3 Nc5 15 Nd2 Rxe3 16 fxe3 Qb4 gave Black some compensation in N.Birnboim-Y.Gruenfeld, Munich 1987, but I'm by no means sure that it's enough after 17 Ra3!, not least because c4 is loose.

### **14 Nxe5 Bxe5**

Black will follow up with ...Bd7 and perhaps also ...Qb4, and should be okay. I certainly haven't been able to find a particularly good plan for White: for example, 15 e4 Bd7 16 Bf3 Nf6 17 Qc2 Qb4 leaves Black with sufficient activity.

## **Conclusion**

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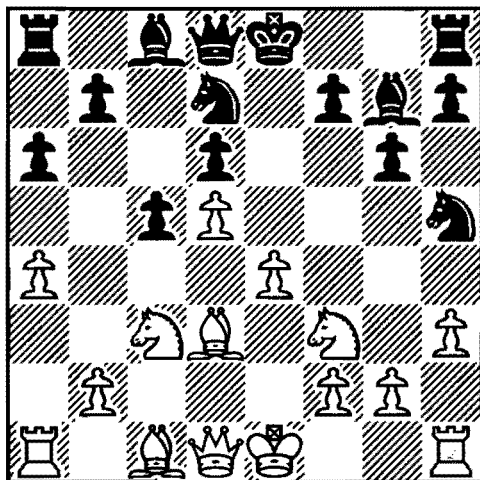
Next time you encounter a solid fianchetto-type, why not surprise him with 10 Nd2 b6? The straightforward exchanging follow-up ...Ba6 looks like quite an easy equalizer, and I'm not sure why this line isn't more popular. White doesn't, of course, have to go 10 Nd2, but Black can generate sufficient counterplay against the alternatives, either with ...Ne4 or with 10 Bf4 Nh5.

## Chapter Four

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# Not Castling in the Modern Classical

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 h3 a6 9 a4 Nbd7 10 Bd3 Nh5!? (Diagram 1)**



**Diagram 1 (W)**

The so-called Modern Classical Variation has been pretty popular of late. With an early h3, White prevents Black's favourite idea of ...Bg4 and questions what Black is going to do with his light-squared bishop. I've long toiled to find a way with

which Black could point to h3 as being irrelevant and then suddenly I came across the fascinating idea that is the subject of this chapter!

After 8...a6 White can allow Black to expand with 9 Bd3 b5, but many players don't like such a scenario or simply play 9 a4 on autopilot. Our star response of 9...Nbd7 10 Bd3 Nh5!? does move the knight for a second time and to the rim, but sometimes you have to fight fire with fire and there is method to Black's apparent madness:

- i. Actually the knight does have some very reasonable potential options from h5. Indeed, we will see it hopping into f4, being sacrificed on g3 and sometimes even preparing ...f5 after retreating to g7.
- ii. The Benoni bishop is immediately unblocked. Furthermore, Black plans a swift ...Ne5, which may well facilitate the chance to park the bishop on either d4 or e5.
- iii. The d8-h4 diagonal is also cleared, paving the way for an early introduction of the black queen into the game and this can come with serious force if White castles kingside.
- iv. Black's f-pawn is no longer obstructed, which means that the aggressive thrust ...f5 might come into play quicker than it usually does.
- v. It is rarely justifiable to keep the king in the centre when there is a chance of it being opened, but Black is happy to avoid castling kingside because he intends the g-file to be used by his king's rook!

These points may all sound a bit abstract at the moment, so let's knuckle down and see some of them in action:

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□ S.Skembris ■ R.Wojtaszek

Athens 2006

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Nf3 Bg7 8 h3 a6 9 a4 Nbd7 10 Bd3 Nh5!? 11 0-0**

I'm sure that many might play this without really thinking, but I can't help wondering whether it might just be a mistake.

**11...Ne5 (Diagram 2)**

Total justification for the earlier ...Nbd7! Black seeks to improve the scope of both his bishops.

**12 Be2**

Instead 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 13 f4 Bd4+ would leave the Benoni bishop a very happy bunny! Indeed, it's no great surprise that the text has been favoured every time that this position has been reached in practice, although admittedly that's not an awful lot!

**12...Nxf3+ 13 Bxf3 Qh4!**

The text avoids losing a pawn and brings her majesty to the area of the board where Black intends to inflict some damage. The great Bobby Fischer caused a stir when he allowed a similar bishop for knight trade in his historic World Championship match with Boris Spassky. Here, though, things are going to be even better for Black: as he hasn't castled, he is going to get to use the half-open g-file.

## 14 Bxh5

Given that it compromises Black's pawn structure and puts a stop to the knight descending on f4, this may also be a popular reaction. Alternatives will be considered in the Looking a Little Deeper section, below.

## 14...gxh5 (Diagram 3) 15 Ne2

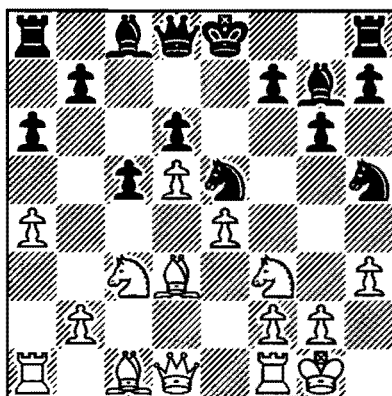


Diagram 2 (W)

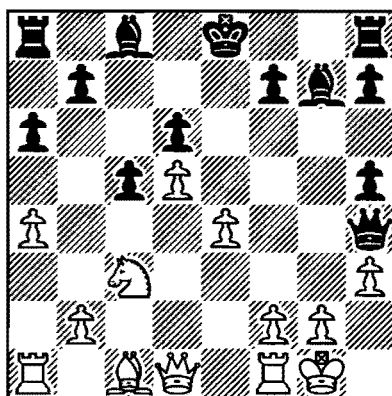


Diagram 3 (W)

It's only natural for White to offer some cover to his kingside. Instead 15 Qd3 Rg8 16 Kh1 Bd7 17 f4 appears to leave White protecting some key squares, but the deflection 17...c4! proves that the white queen is overstretched and indeed lost after 18 Qf3 Bd4. One threat is 19...Bg4 and the other is demonstrated by 19 Be3 Rg3 20 Bxd4 when 20...Bxh3 is crushing. That said, you can't argue too much with 20...Rxf3 21 Rxf3 0-0-0 22 f5 Re8 23 Re3 Rg8 24 Rc1 Rg3 25 Ne2 Rxe3 26 Bxe3 Qxe4 27 Rc3 Bxf5 28 Ng3 Qb1+ 29 Rc1 Qd3 30 Rc3 Qd1+ 31 Bg1 Bd3 32 h4 Qg4 33 Bh2 Qxh4 34 b3 Qd4 and 0-1 in M.Dziuba-R.Wojtaszek, Warsaw (rapid) 2005.

Note too that 15 f4? Bxh3! 16 gxh3 Qg3+ 17 Kh1 Qxh3+ 18 Kg1 Bd4+ 19 Rf2 (Diagram 4) drastically highlights the danger to White and leaves Black able to deliver mate in a couple of ways, such as with 19...Rg8+.

## 15...Rg8! (Diagram 5)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Now we start to see the advantage of not castling! Black is about to be attacking big time with queen, rook and two bishops, and kicking off the threats is the very serious ...Bxh3.

### 16 Ra3 Be5

White has guarded the h3-pawn along the third rank, but now the threat is renewed.

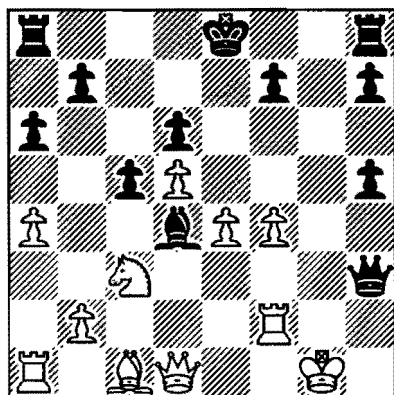


Diagram 4 (B)

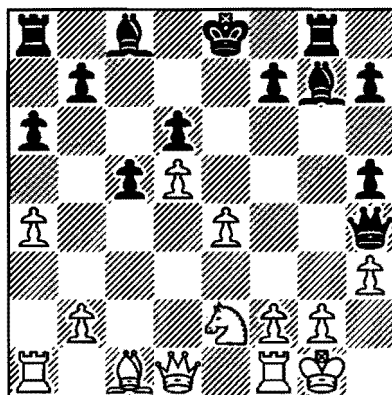


Diagram 5 (W)

### 17 Kh1 Qxe4

Grabbing a pawn and threatening mate on g2.

### 18 Ng3 Qg6?!

Only Grandmaster Wojtaszek will know whether or not he saw the visual 18...Bxh3! (Diagram 6) 19 Nxex4 Bxg2+ 20 Kg1 Bf3+. Perhaps he simply favoured keeping the queens on, but nevertheless 21 Ng3 (or 21 Bg5 Bxd1 22 Rxd1 f5) 21...Bxd1 22 Rxd1 h4 would have led to a comfortably winning endgame.

### 19 f4 Bd4 20 Qe2+?!

White soon regrets this decision and he would have been better off playing the immediate 20 f5!.

### 20...Kd8 21 f5 Qf6 22 Qxh5

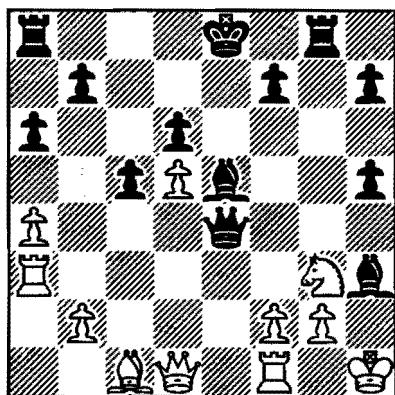
22 Ne4 Qe7 23 Bf4 Bxf5 would see Black's bishops spring back to life, but I'd still rather have seen that 18...Bxh3 move!

### 22...Bd7 23 Ne4 Qe5 24 Qxf7 Rg7! 25 Qxg7

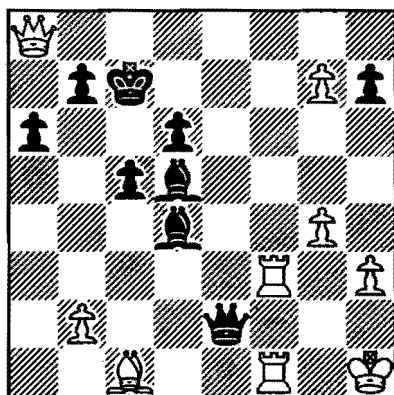
The end to this game is more than a little bemusing as White bows out rather

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

tamely. The finish that the audience was hoping for is the stunning line 25 Qf8+ Kc7 26 Qxa8 Qxe4 27 Raf3 Qe2 28 g4 Bxa4 29 f6 (or 29 Qf8 Bc2 30 f6 Be4 31 fxg7 Qxf1+ 32 Kh2 Qg1 mate) 29...Bb3 30 fxg7 Bxd5 (**Diagram 7**) when it's fair to say that the bishops have made their mark!



**Diagram 6 (W)**



**Diagram 7 (W)**

**25...Qxg7 26 f6 Qf7 0-1**

The black queen might seem a bit passive, but after, say, 27 Ng5 Qxd5 28 f7 Kc7 29 f8Q Rxf8 30 Rxf8 h6 31 Nf3 Bg7 it most certainly wouldn't be!



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Crushing play from Wojtaszek and it certainly didn't take Black long to build up a decisive attack. Furthermore, it appears that Black is yet to lose a game after employing this intriguing new idea!

## Looking a Little Deeper

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 h3 a6 9 a4 Nbd7 10 Bd3**

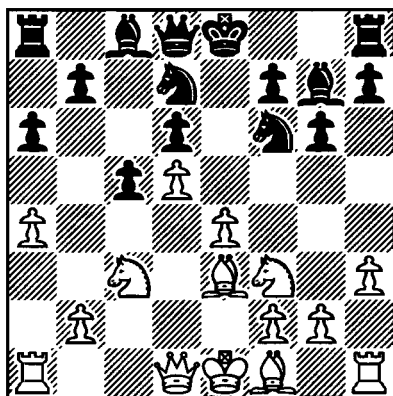
Standard, but no lesser player than Topalov recently tried 10 Be3 (**Diagram 8**).

This could have well have been because he didn't have anything against our 10 Bd3 Nh5!? idea, and understood that another attempt to try and avoid it with 10 Nd2 0-0 11 Nc4?! Nb6 12 Na3 Re8 is pretty lame and leaves White experiencing problems in the centre. However, after 10 Be3 0-0 11 Be2 it strikes me that White has committed his dark-squared bishop a little too early in this position which rather resembles an old-fashioned Classical Variation. V.Topalov-V.Ivanchuk,

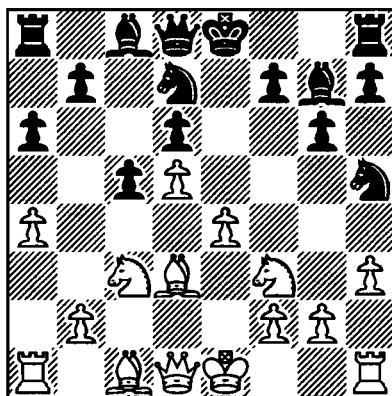


Wijk aan Zee 2008, continued 11...Qe7 12 Nd2 Ne8 13 Nc4 Rb8 14 0-0 Ne5 15 Nb6 Nd7 16 Nxc8 Rxc8 17 Re1 Nef6 and clearly Black was pretty comfortable.

**10...Nh5 (Diagram 9)**



**Diagram 8 (B)**



**Diagram 9 (W)**

Let's now take a closer look at White's options in this already quite critical position:

---

**A: 11 0-0**

**B: 11 g4**

**C: 11 Bg5**

---

**A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 h3 a6 9 a4 Nbd7 10 Bd3 Nh5 11 0-0**

As we have already seen, Black should be hoping for this fairly natural move. Now he can set about targeting the white king!

**11...Ne5 12 Be2 Nxf3+ 13 Bxf3 Qh4 14 Bg4**

Our illustrative game showed what can happen if White grants Black a half-open g-file by exchanging on h5. By the same token White cannot afford to be casual as the variation 14 Be3 Be5 15 Qd2 Nf4 16 a5 Nxh3+ 17 gxh3 Qxh3 (**Diagram 10**) fully demonstrates. Having both bishops, the knight and the queen working together like this means serious business!

**14...Be5!? (Diagram 11)**

As there have been only a few games in this exciting new variation, I think that I'd

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

like to say at least a few words about each of them. Here practice has also seen:

a) 14...Nf6 15 Bxc8 Rxc8 16 Kh2 Nd7 17 g3 Qe7 18 Bf4 0-0 19 Re1 Ne5 20 Bxe5 Bxe5 21 f4 Bd4 22 Qf3 Rce8 23 Re2 Qd7 24 a5 Qc7 25 Qd3 Re7 26 Ra2 Rfe8 27 Qc4 Qd7 28 Ra1 Qd8 29 Ra2 Qd7 was agreed drawn in B.Szczechowicz-P.Dobrowolski, Krakow 1999. Fair enough!

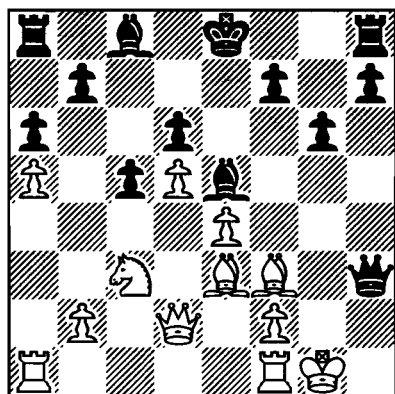


Diagram 10 (W)

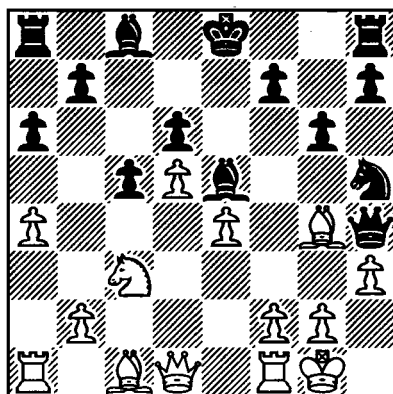


Diagram 11 (W)

b) Very recently Wojtaszek himself preferred 14...Bxg4 15 Qxg4 Qxg4 16 hxg4 Nf6 and after 17 Bf4 Ke7 18 f3 Nd7 19 Bg5+ Ke8 20 Bd2 Ne5 21 Nd1 Nc4 22 Bc3 Bxc3 23 bxc3 Kd7 24 Kf2 b5 he enjoyed quite a comfortable position in N.Brunner-R.Wojtaszek, French League 2008. Although it takes a lot of the fun away, clearly Black need not fear the queens coming off.

On the face of it the text looks the most interesting move. Black redirects his bishop towards the white king and binds down on the f4-square. Sadly, though, an endgame might be on its way in any case!

### 15 Bxc8 Rxc8 (Diagram 12)

Thus Black has solved the issue of his problem piece in the Benoni, or rather has had it solved for him!

### 16 Qg4

Although after 16 f4 Black can't take the pawn (16...Nxf4?! 17 Bxf4 Bxf4 is well met by 18 Qf3 g5 19 Ne2), the g3-square has been weakened and 16...Bd4+ 17 Kh2 Qg3+ 18 Kh1 should be good for Black whether he bags the lukewarm pawn on c3 or simply castles. Meanwhile 16 a5 0-0 leaves White wondering whether Black will take the option of conceding his bishop to net the e4-pawn. Furthermore, ...f5 is also an attractive future possibility and so it's no great surprise that White might opt for the text.

16...Qxg4 17 hxg4 Nf6 (Diagram 13)

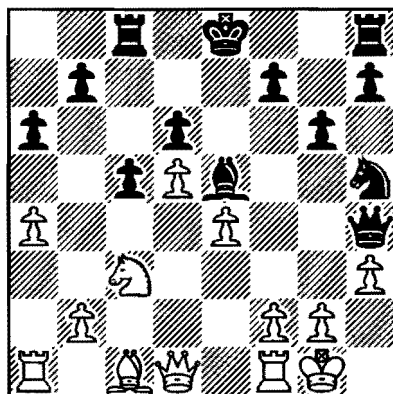


Diagram 12 (W)

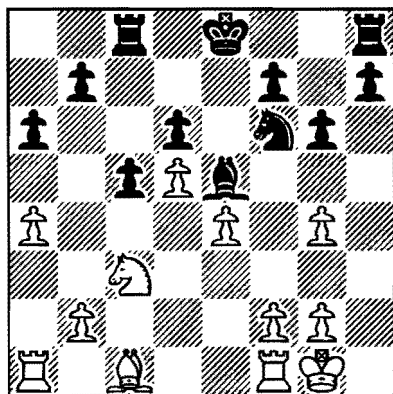


Diagram 13 (W)

This unbalanced position is probably about level, although Black does have an active pair of minor pieces and there are certainly chances to outplay the opponent. Indeed, do note the following encounter: 18 f3 Bd4+ 19 Kh2 Nd7 20 Kg3 h5 21 gxh5 Rxh5 22 Bd2 Ke7 23 Rh1 Nf6 24 Rh3 Rch8 25 Rb1 Be5+ 26 Kf2 Rxh3 27 gxh3 Rxh3 28 Ne2 Rh2+ 29 Ke3 Nd7 30 b4? Bd4+ and with a piece about to go west, White had to resign in J.Cox-E.Lie, Gausdal 2007.

B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 h3 a6 9 a4 Nbd7 10 Bd3 Nh5 11 g4 (Diagram 14)

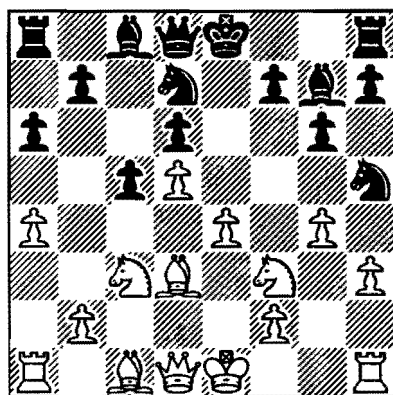


Diagram 14 (B)

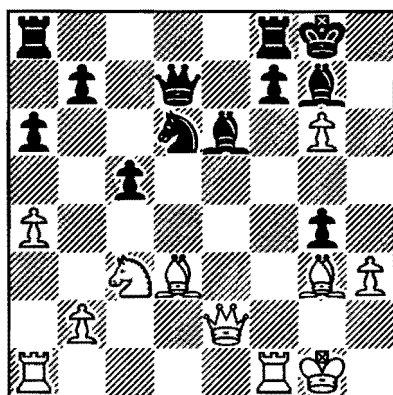


Diagram 15 (W)

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

White sends the adventurous black knight back to whence it came. However, weaknesses have now been created which Black can soon set about trying to exploit. Those out to try and win (which, let's face it, should be all of you reading this book!) should be delighted with this scenario as now things are destined to be mixed up!

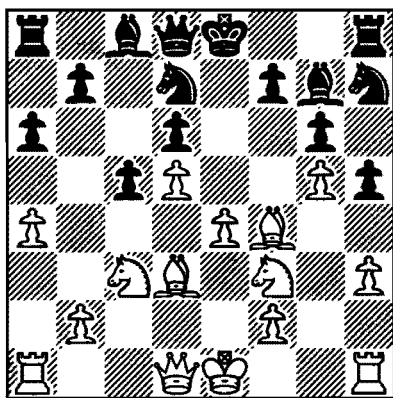
**11...Nhf6 12 Bf4 h5!?**

With the d6-pawn attacked, Black really throws the cat amongst the pigeons or at least offers to. Actually Black need not offer his d6-pawn and 12...Qe7 13 0-0 h5 also looks quite plausible. In practice White has tried to counter with the aggressive-looking 14 e5, but 14...dxe5 15 d6 Qd8 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 Bxe5 0-0 left him with plenty of weaknesses and Black better in J.Gonzalez Garcia-A.Wojtkiewicz, New York 1994. Credit to White, though, as he tried to continue dynamically, although after 18 f4 hxg4 19 f5 Ne8 20 Bg3 Nxd6 21 fxg6 Be6 22 Qe2 Qd7 (**Diagram 15**) his efforts had been more than rebuffed, leaving White with the more vulnerable pieces, the more exposed king and a pawn less!

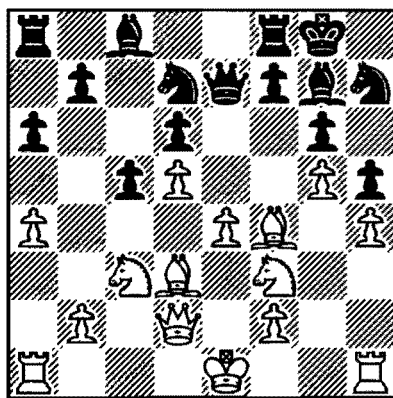


**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** The late Aleksander Wojtkiewicz was famed for his innovative and exciting opening play as Black. Undoubtedly one of its creators, it says a lot for this idea that it had his backing.

**13 g5 Nh7 (Diagram 16)**



**Diagram 16 (W)**



**Diagram 17 (W)**

**14 Qd2**

After 14 Bxd6 Nxg5 15 Nxg5 Qxg5 a suitable imbalance is created too. There may

be potential in White's centre pawns, but they are well monitored at present. Suddenly with his position riddled with holes, White is begging to swap the queens, but even 16 Qd2 Qf6 17 Qf4 (upon 17 Bg3 h4 18 Bh2 Ne5 Black is also destined for a bishop-pair advantage) 17...Qxf4 18 Bxf4 Ne5 19 Kd2 keeps things on the boil since Black can try 19...f5!? 20 Bxe5 Bxe5 21 exf5 0-0, although the less committal 19...0-0 also keeps things interesting.

#### **14...Qe7**

Now that White has overprotected his g5-pawn, Black takes time to guard d6 and to gain further control over the key e5-square.

#### **15 h4**

This is a typically human reaction. To be fair though, once Black has ruled out any e4-e5 ideas, it's difficult to come up with a good plan for White. Black, however, has no such problems: he can safely castle and then focus his attention on the e-file and possibly the f-file too.

#### **15...0-0 (Diagram 17) 16 Rg1 c4!**

I almost forgot to mention this pawn. Potentially vital in an endgame, in the middlegame it can be useful for deflection purposes. On c5 it controls the d4-square, but when it moves it takes control of both the d3- and b3-squares, and makes way for a knight to enter the action.

#### **17 Bc2**

Black must always be cautious when conceding his Benoni bishop for a knight, but 17 Bxc4 Bxc3 18 bxc3 (18 Qxc3? Qxe4+ drops a piece) 18...Qxe4+ 19 Be2 Re8 offers excellent play along the e-file and leaves mate on g7 a long way away!

#### **17...f5**

Consistent with his play so far, Black continues in dynamic fashion. However, keeping his options open for the moment with 17...Nc5 looks very reasonable too.

#### **18 Nd4**

Although the rook would see some g-file action, I don't think that the contortionate 18 gxf6 Qxf6 19 Ne2 would appeal to many.

#### **18...Nc5 (Diagram 18)**

As I have discovered to my detriment in the past, the downside to the ...c4 advance is that it potentially offers an enemy knight access to the d4-square. However, as Black here has both the c6- and e6-squares well covered, this is not a problem. Now Black has pressure against all of d4, e4 and f4, and we can safely say that he stood better in L.Ravi-K.Lie, Liverpool 2007.

**C) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 h3 a6 9 a4 Nbd7 10 Bd3 Nh5 11 Bg5 (Diagram 19)**

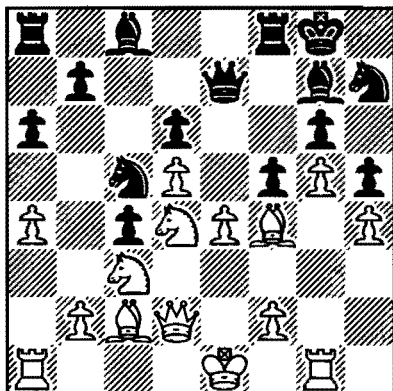


Diagram 18 (W)

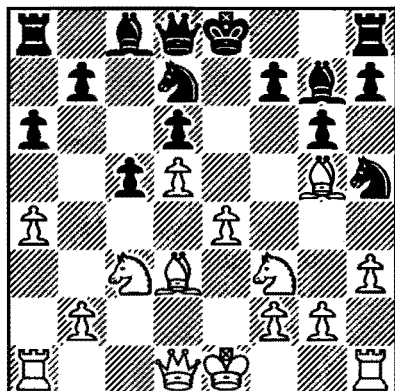


Diagram 19 (B)

This stands out as a natural attempt to throw a spanner in the works. Furthermore, it doesn't commit White's king or concede any weaknesses!

**11...Bf6**

Now White faces an important choice:

---

**C1: 12 Be3**

**C2: 12 Bh6**

---

Note that White's intention is not to simply orchestrate a trade of bishops and Black could be very satisfied with 12 Bxf6 Qxf6. He would have the e5- and f4-squares nicely within his grasp, and it is far more likely that he will be placing his knights on such posts than that White will get to steamroller him with his e- and f-pawns. Instead by avoiding the bishop swap, White removes the h5-knight's most natural retreat square and hopes that he has misplaced Black's bishop.

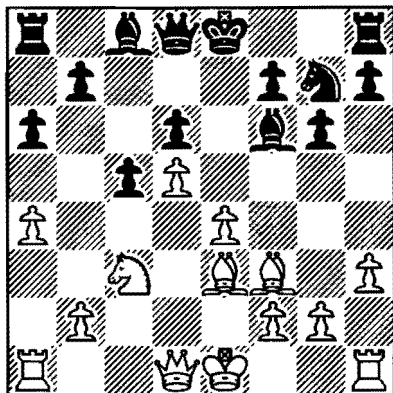
**C1) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 h3 a6 9 a4 Nbd7 10 Bd3 Nh5 11 Bg5 Bf6 12 Be3 Ne5**



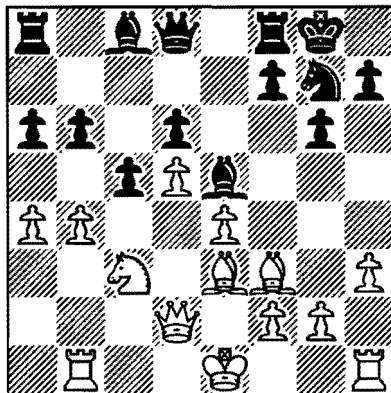
**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** If Black prefers to castle, then he should be aware that he runs the risk of transposing back to the realms of normal (well, relatively speaking!) theory; more specifically, the variation 8...0-0 (rather than our 8...a6) 9 Nf3 Nbd7 10 0-0 Nh5.

That need not be a bad thing, though, and, indeed, I have already been prone to recommending going short when the time is right. That said, the text is consistent with the theme of this chapter.

**13 Be2 Nxf3+ 14 Bxf3 Ng7 (Diagram 20)**



**Diagram 20 (W)**



**Diagram 21 (W)**

The main point behind White's crafty 11 Bg5 is that now ...Qh4 isn't available and thus a 'fianchettoing' of the knight seems forced. Actually I have idly speculated about 14...Be5 15 Bxh5 gxh5 16 Qxh5 Qb6, but it seems unnecessary as the text looks okay anyway. The attacked black knight retreats to an odd square, but it will have a chance to rejoin the action later.

**15 Qd2**

Sometimes seeking to trade the dark-squared bishops with ...Bg5 can be a candidate for Black, and the text certainly puts a stop to that. Nevertheless, a couple of obvious alternatives stand out:

a) 15 Bg4 0-0 16 0-0 Re8 17 Bxc8 Rxc8 18 Qc2 Qe7 19 Bf4 Bxc3 20 bxc3 Qxe4 21 Qxe4 Rxe4 22 Bxd6 Rd8 23 Bxc5 Rxd5 24 Bb6 Ne6 simplified down to quite a comfortable ending for Black in G.Tallaksen-E.Lie, Norwegian Championship, Hamar 2007.

b) 15 0-0 Be5!? (regarding my advice on possible transpositions, 15...0-0 16 Bf4 Be5 has been seen before via a different move order, but the position without Black having castled is unique) 16 Be2 f5 17 f4 and now 17...Bxc3 18 bxc3 fxe4 19 Qc2 0-0 20 Qxe4 Re8 21 Qd3 Qe7 looks rather good for Black.

c) 15 Bf4 can be seen in the notes to White's 13th move in Line C2.

**15...0-0**

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Thus Black has castled after all, but now the rook on f8 adds force to a future ...f5 thrust.

### 16 Rb1

Or 16 0-0 Be5 when ...f5 is up next; a move that may single-handedly activate Black's bishop, knight and rook!

### 16...Be5 17 b4 b6 (Diagram 21)

Steadying the ship and one would expect ...f5 to be next on the agenda. Now with White's king in the middle, the tension tackling a4-a5 would be premature. Thus 18 Ne2 was preferred in P.San Segundo Carrillo-R.Wojtaszek, Turin Olympiad 2006, when I still rather like Black's chances, although the desired result was achieved in a slightly different manner to that which might have been expected: 18...a5 (18...f5 19 a5 fxe4 20 Bxe4 Bf5 looks very reasonable, although stalling White's queenside advance is sensible too) 19 bxc5 bxc5 20 0-0 f5 21 Bg5 Qe8 22 Nc3 fxe4 23 Nxe4 Nf5 24 Rfe1 Qf7 25 Rb6 c4 26 Bg4 Qa7 27 Rc6 c3 28 Rxc3 h5 29 Bxf5 Bxf5 30 Rc6 Rab8 31 Be3 Qe7 32 Bg5 Qd7 33 Nc5 Qf7 34 Rxe5 dxe5 35 d6 Rb1+ 36 Kh2 Bxh3 37 d7 Qc4 38 Rxg6+ Kh7 39 Rh6+ Kg8 40 d8Q Rh1+ 0-1.

**C2) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 Bg7 8 h3 a6 9 a4 Nbd7 10 Bd3 Nh5 11 Bg5 Bf6 12 Bh6 (Diagram 22)**

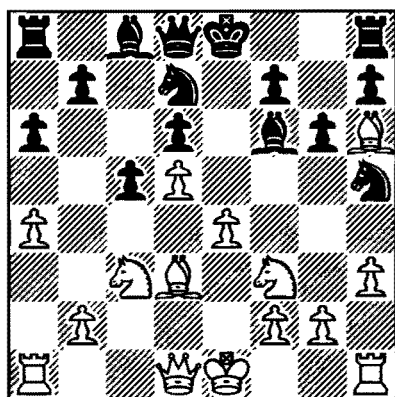


Diagram 22 (B)

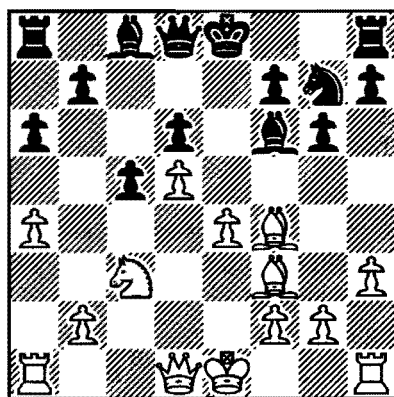


Diagram 23 (B)

More useful than 12 Be3 in that it prevents Black from castling, this more adventurous move is also more risky as the bishop could conceivably end up being trapped.

### 12...Ne5



Black sticks to his usual game plan.



**ROLL THE DICE!** Under these new circumstances, there might also be some takers for 12...g5!?. A simple follow-up is ...Rg8-g6 and ...Nf4 is back on the menu too.

After 13 e5!? dxex5 14 0-0 Nf4 I'm not too sure what's going on and my various analysis engines rather disagree with each other. Black's position is certainly a bit ropey, but he is a pawn up and some readers may thrive in such an unbalanced situation.

### 13 Nxe5

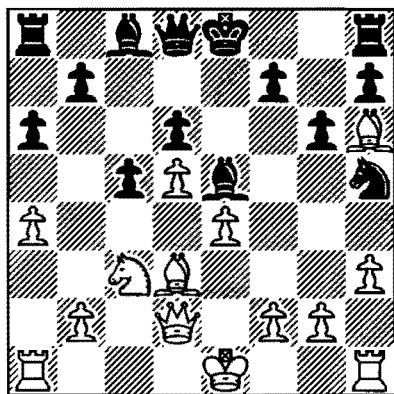
Instead 13 Be2 is usually the standard reply in this sort of scenario and, indeed, 13...Nxf3+ 14 Bxf3 Ng7 would transpose to Line C1 but with White's bishop on h6 rather than e3. However, moving the bishop again with 15 Bf4 (**Diagram 23**) reaches a position which can also occur from Line C1 (see note 'c' to White's 15th move there). White puts some pressure on the d6-pawn, but despite this and the currently awkward-looking knight, I would say that Black has a few reasonable continuations here, including:

a) 15...0-0 16 0-0 Bd4 17 Qd2 f5 gave Black reasonable counterplay in E.Karavade-G.Gopal, Atul 2006.

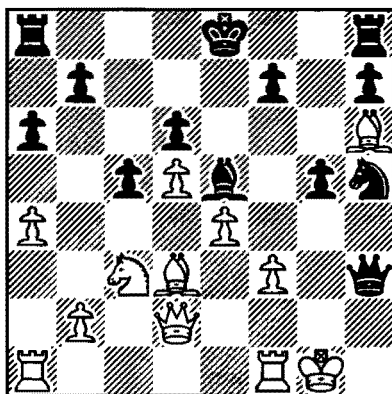
b) Similar is 15...Bd4 16 0-0 0-0 with ...f5 to follow.

c) 15...Qe7 16 0-0 Be5!? (16...g5 should be met by the critical 17 e5) 17 Qd2 0-0 18 Bxe5 Qxe5 19 Be2 f5 is another reasonable approach and now 20 f4? Qd4+ 21 Qxd4 cxd4 would cost White a pawn.

### 13...Bxe5 14 Qd2 (**Diagram 24**)



**Diagram 24 (B)**



**Diagram 25 (W)**

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Once again 14 0-0 Qh4! is rather dangerous for White: for example, 15 Qd2 Bxh3! 16 gxh3 Qxh3 17 f3 g5! (**Diagram 25**) and there's no good defence to 18...Bd4+.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** It only requires White to be a little casual for Black to suddenly whip up a dangerous attack after ...Qh4. Indeed, it's no surprise that White has often struggled thus far in practice against our dangerous idea!

### 14...Ng7

This position is actually a good one for home study. Black doesn't have to follow our strong grandmaster friend and other intriguing options include:

- a) 14...Rg8!? intends to meet 15 0-0?! with 15...g5!. Hence 15 Bg5 is critical when 15...f6 16 Be3 g5 leads to quite a fascinating scenario.
- b) 14...Bd7!? possibly eyes up a future ...b5, but actually sees Black sneakily waiting for 15 0-0 before hitting White with 15...Rg8!?. Then the bishop-trapping 16...g5 is threatened and after 16 Bg5 f6 (16...Qa5 is also far from ridiculous either) 17 Be3 g5 (Black binds down on the f4-square and has ideas of ...g4 in mind) 18 Qd1 Nf4 (18...g4!? obviously comes into consideration too) 19 Bxf4 gxf4 20 Qh5+ Kf8 21 Qxh7 Qe7! 22 Qxe7+ Kxe7 (**Diagram 26**) Black enjoys superb play for the pawn down the g- and h-files.

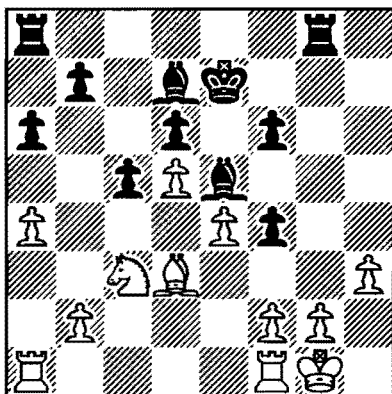


Diagram 26 (W)

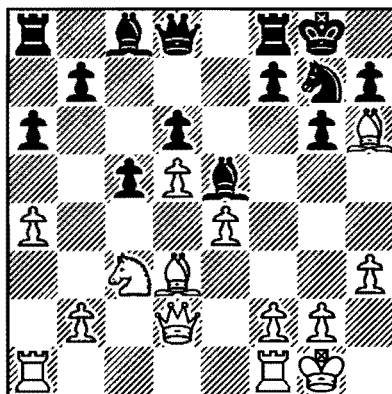


Diagram 27 (W)

### 15 0-0 0-0 (Diagram 27)

We've reached another unique position in which Black looks set to break with ...f5.

**16 Ne2 f5 17 exf5 gxf5 18 Bg5 Bf6 19 Bxf6 Qxf6**

Black has unbalanced the position and will look to advance with ...f4, while meet-

ing Nf4 with ...Qd4. He went on to win after a tough struggle in K.Szromba-R.Wojtaszek, Laczna 2002.

### Conclusion

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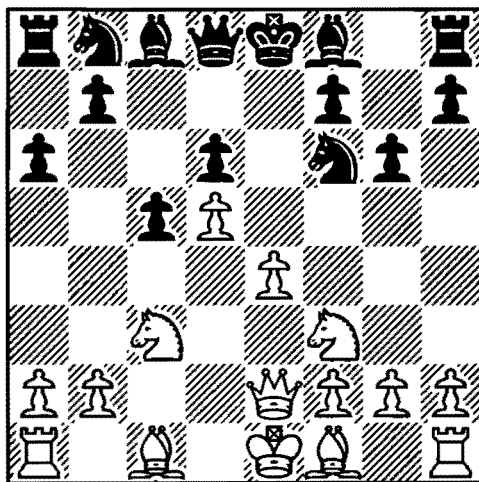
Though it's early days, Black's results with this offbeat but dangerous variation have been very impressive. The title of this chapter is perhaps a little deceptive, since Black does sometimes land up castling after all, but the amount of times which we've seen an early ...Rg8 in action has impressive. If you have been suitably impressed, then my advice is to use this weapon as much as you can before it becomes the main line and everybody knows about it!

## Chapter Five

---

# Epishin's Deadly 8 Qe2

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 a6 8 Qe2!? (Diagram 1)**



**Diagram 1 (B)**

After 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4, Black always used to play the automatic 7...Bg7. However, in the early 1990s the refinement 7...a6 emerged as a serious alternative. Since then this little move has steadily in-

creased in popularity, so much so that today it shares an equal billing with 7...Bg7. One of the reasons why 7...a6 has become fashionable is that it avoids the Modern Main Line, 7...Bg7 8 h3, which is widely accepted as one of the greatest challenges to the Modern Benoni.

The point of Black's move order is to meet the typical 8 a4 with 8...Bg4!, solving the problem of the light-squared bishop. This piece is nearly always happy to trade itself for one of White's, since Black often struggles to find a useful role for it (note that 7...Bg4?! is met by 8 Qa4+! Nbd7 9 Nd2! – hence the need to include the move pair ...a6 and a2-a4). After 8 a4 Bg4, play typically continues 9 Be2 Bxf3 10 Bxf3 Nbd7 11 0-0 Bg7 12 Bf4 Qe7 13 Re1 0-0 (**Diagram 2**), and this position, while perfectly playable for White, is generally known to hold little fear for Black: White's theoretical advantage is minimal, and as results have suggested, Black's position is fairly easy to play over the board.

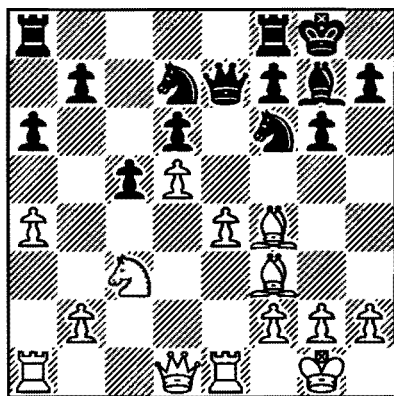


Diagram 2 (W)

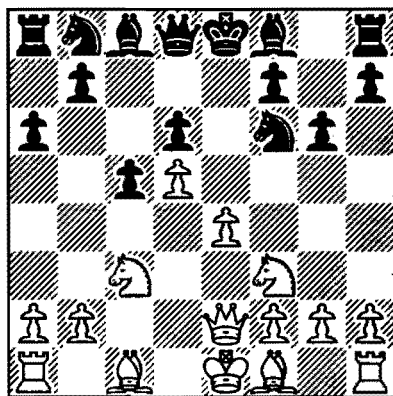


Diagram 3 (B)

What other choices does White have against 7...a6? Well, he could still reach a form of the Modern Main Line by playing 8 h3, albeit one in which Black is allowed to expand on the queenside with 8...b5. White can also play 8 Bf4, transposing to the variation 7 Bf4 a6 8 e4. There didn't seem to be any critical alternative to these moves, but then in 2004 Vladimir Epishin unleashed a new idea and one which suddenly put Black on the back foot: 8 Qe2!? (**Diagram 3**).

This crude-looking move has become a real pain for 7...a6 supporters. There hasn't been a great number of games to go on, but to date White's results have been amazingly good.

White's basic idea is to exploit Black's lagging development, which 7...a6 certainly doesn't help, by blasting through with a very quick e4-e5. When I first came across Epishin's idea while working on the website *ChessPublishing.com*, I was of the

opinion that 8 Qe2 was simply too crude to cause Black any real problems in the long term. However, that was four years ago since when many strong players have been crushed playing Black, and still no concrete way has been found to demonstrate equality!

Epishin's own record with 8 Qe2 is impressive: 4½/5 in the games I have on my database; all against strong players and all of his wins pretty convincing. Let's begin by looking at the first of these, where his opponent couldn't have been helped by the time limit. It's difficult enough as it is facing a dangerous new opening idea from one of the world's leading theoreticians, without having only a few minutes for the entire game to deal with it!

---

□ V.Epishin ■ L.Gofshtein

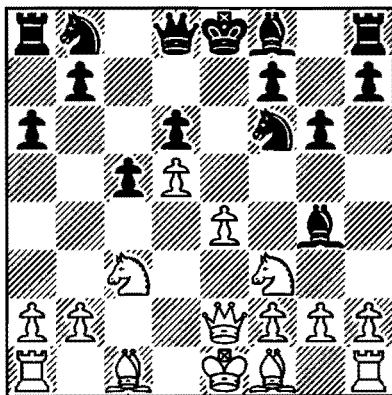
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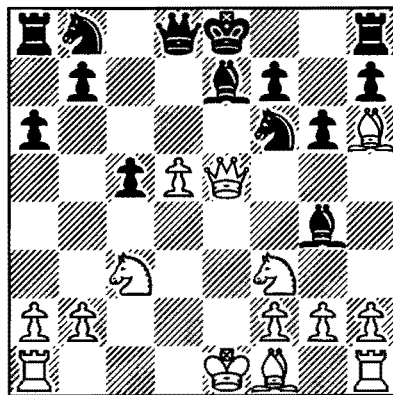
**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Nf3 a6 8 Qe2**

I wonder if Epishin's discovery of 8 Qe2 was influenced by the knowledge of a similar but more recognized line, namely 6 Nf3 g6 7 Bf4 a6 8 e4 b5 9 Qe2?

**8...Bg4 (Diagram 4)**



**Diagram 4 (W)**



**Diagram 5 (B)**

Aside from 8...Bg4, Black's main options are 8...Bg7 and 8...Nbd7, both of which will be studied in the Looking a Little Deeper section.

**9 e5 dxe5 10 Qxe5+ Be7?**

This leads Black into big trouble; in fact he is probably already losing! This does seem harsh, as on the surface 10...Be7 appears to be quite a natural reaction. Instead 10...Qe7 must be played and this move will be studied later.

**11 Bh6! (Diagram 5)**

Crucially preventing Black from castling, and now the pin on the e7-bishop becomes very annoying.

**11...Bxf3 12 gxf3 Nbd7**

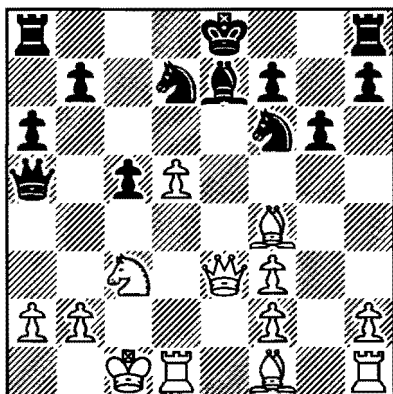
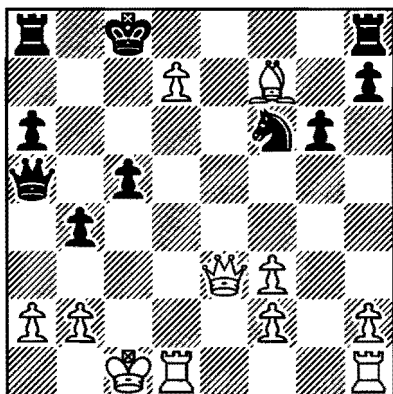
It's already difficult to suggest anything good for Black. The problem is that offering to trade queens with 12...Qd6 just loses to 13 Qxd6 Bxd6 14 Bg7, forking rook and knight, and 12...Qb6 13 d6! Qxd6 14 Qxd6 Bxd6 15 Bg7 has similar consequences.

**13 Qe3**

Now 14 d6 is an obvious threat.

**13...Qc7**

13...Qb6 14 0-0-0 c4 is probably Black's best chance, but 15 Rd4 looks good enough: for example, 15...Kd8 16 d6 Bxd6 17 Bg5 Bc5 18 Rxd7+ Kxd7 19 Bh3+ Kc6 20 Qf4 with a powerful attack which Black would be fortunate to survive.

**14 Bf4! Qa5 15 0-0-0 (Diagram 6)****Diagram 6 (B)****Diagram 7 (B)**

15 d6 is also very strong, and 15...Nd5 16 Qe4 N7f6 17 Qe5 0-0 18 dxe7 Rfe8 19 0-0-0 Rxe7 20 Nxd5! Rxe5 21 Nxf6+ Kg7 22 Bxe5 is winning for White. However, Epishin's choice is very practical, especially for a blitz game.

**15...Kd8**

Otherwise 16 d6 wins a piece.

**16 d6 Bf8 17 Bc4**

Black's position is already a shambles and now the f7-pawn is dropping.

**17...b5 18 Bxf7 b4 19 Ne4**

19 Bg5! Bg7 20 Nd5 is even stronger.

**19...Bg7 20 Bg5 Kc8 21 Nxf6 Bxf6 22 Bxf6 Nxf6 23 d7+! (Diagram 7) 23...Kb7**

23...Nxd7 loses to 24 Rxd7! Kxd7 25 Rd1+ Kc8 26 Be6+ Kc7 27 Qe5+, etc. Against 23...Kd8 White can win in various ways, one being 24 Qe8+! Kc7 25 Qe5+.

**24 Rd6 Qd8 25 Qe5**

The rest is absolute carnage. In a normal game Black would have resigned long ago.

**25...Nxd7 26 Qd5+ Kb8 27 Rxd7 Qf6 28 Qb7 mate (1-0)**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Of course it has to be remembered that this was a blitz game, albeit one played between two grandmasters. However, the fact that Black can end up in a losing position so quickly by playing one poor move (10...Be7) is a great advertisement for 8 Qe2!

## Looking a Little Deeper

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 a6 8 Qe2**

Black three most important options are:

---

**A: 8...Bg4**

**B: 8...Nbd7**

**C: 8...Bg7!?**

---

Both 8...Bg4 and 8...Nbd7 take some sort of prophylactic action against e4-e5, even if it's not enough to discourage White from carrying out his plan, whereas 8...Bg7 actually invites White's central lunge.

Before moving on to the main lines, let's first check out some less important alternatives for Black:

a) 8...b5?! is provocative in the extreme, and there's no guesses as to how White should answer: 9 e5! dxe5 10 Nxe5 (**Diagram 8**) and White can expect to gain a big advantage: for example, 10...Qe7 (or 10...Be7 11 Bh6!) 11 Bf4 Nbd7 (against 11...Nh5 White can crush Black on the long light-squared diagonal with 12 g3! Nd7 13 d6! Qe6 14 Bg2) 12 g3! (again we see the idea of a quick Bg2) 12...Bb7 (12...b4 might be better, but 13 Bg2! bxc3 14 d6 cxb2 15 Rb1 Qe6 16 Bxa8 still looks good for White) 13 Bg2 0-0-0 14 0-0-0 Nxe5 15 Qxe5 Qxe5 16 Bxe5 Bg7 17 Bh3+ and Black's king is badly caught in the crossfire of the two bishops.



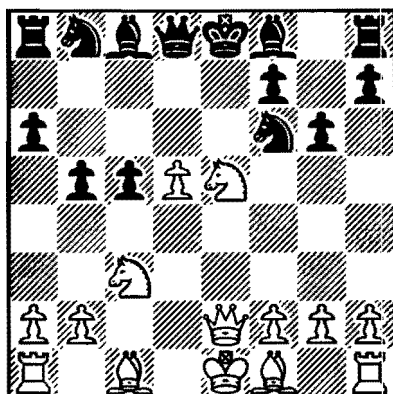


Diagram 8 (B)

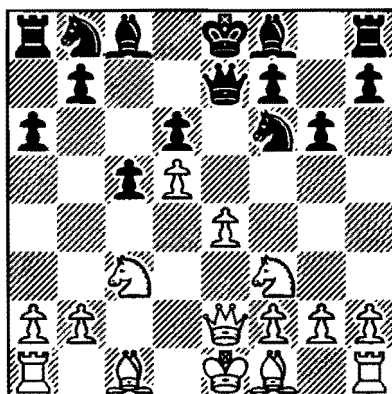


Diagram 9 (W)

b) 8...Be7 takes the sting out of e4-e5, but e7 isn't the ideal place for the Benoni bishop. White can answer by playing 9 a4, when 9...0-0 10 Qc2 must be at least a bit better for him. He can also play more ambitiously with 9 Bh6!? Ng4! (or 9...b5 10 e5!? dxe5 11 Nxe5 b4 12 Ne4 Nxd5 13 0-0-0 Be6 14 Nc4!?, intending 14...Nc6 15 Ncd6+! Bxd6 16 Rxd5!) 10 Bf4 0-0 11 h3 Nf6 (S.Krivoshey-R.Castellanos, La Roda 2006), and now 12 Qc2 b5 13 b3!? Nbd7 14 Bd3 promises White an edge.

c) 8...Qe7 (**Diagram 9**) has been played in a few games. This move usually transposes to positions considered under 8...Nbd7, although an 8...Qe7 move order does give White extra options:

c1) 9 e5 dxe5 10 Qxe5 (10 Nxe5! Nbd7 transposes to Line B, and this is probably White's best course) 10...b5! 11 Bg5 (11 Be2 Nbd7 12 Qc7?! Qd6! was fine for Black in D.Antic-M.Bluvshstein, Tuggeranong 2007) 11...Qxe5+! (11...Nbd7 12 Qxe7+ Bxe7 13 0-0-0 intends d5-d6, and this promising for White) 12 Nxe5 Bg7 13 0-0-0 Bb7, as suggested by Greenfeld in *New in Chess Yearbook 76*, looks unclear to me – Black is more organized here than in some lines.

c2) 9 Bf4!? Bg4 (9...Nbd7! may be Black's best here, when 10 e5 dxe5 11 Nxe5 transposes to the notes to White's 11th move in Line B) 10 Bxd6! Qxd6 11 e5 Bxf3 12 gxf3 Qe7 13 exf6 Qxe2+ 14 Kxe2 Nd7 15 Ne4 0-0-0 16 Bh3 and White is better, A.Fayard-R.Hendriks, Hoogeveen 2007.

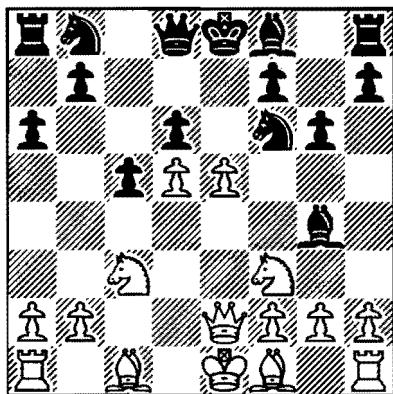


**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** After 9 Bf4 Bg7? the tactic 10 Bxd6! is even stronger, and White is virtually winning after the more or less forced sequence 10...Qxd6 11 e5 Qe7 12 d6! Qe6 13 Ng5! Qg4 14 f3! Qxg5 15 exf6+ Be6 16 fxg7 Rg8 17 f4!, intending 17...Qxf4 18 Nd5.

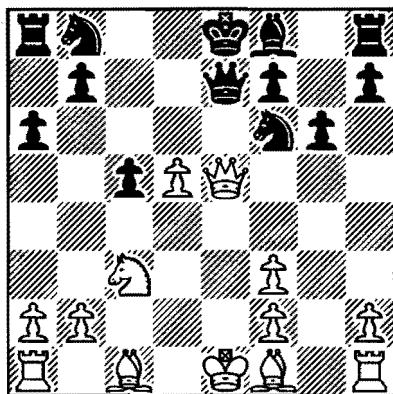
**A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 a6 8 Qe2 Bg4**

7...a6 prepared ...Bg4, and Black goes ahead with his intention. By giving himself the possibility of eliminating the f3-knight, he hopes to take some of the sting out of e4-e5.

**9 e5! (Diagram 10)**



**Diagram 10 (B)**



**Diagram 11 (W)**

Other moves make no sense.

**9...Bxf3**

9...dxe5 is likely to transpose, as Black's bishop on g4 has little else to do but to trade itself for the f3-knight: 10 Qxe5+ Qe7 (10...Be7? was covered in the illustrative game Epishin-Gofshtein) 11 Bf4 (for 11 Qxe7+ Bxe7 12 Bf4 – 12 Ne5!? – 12...Bxf3 13 gxf3, see the note to White's 12th move, below) 11...Bxf3 12 gxf3 transposes to the main text.

**10 gxf3 dxe5 11 Qxe5+ Qe7 (Diagram 11)**

11...Be7? 12 Bh6! again reaches Epishin-Gofshtein.

**12 Bf4!**



**BEWARE! White must seize control of the h2-b8 diagonal, because if Black were able to blockade the d-pawn with ...Bd6, nearly all of his problems would disappear. The importance of this cannot be overemphasized.**

White can trade queens on e7 before playing Bf4, but after looking at both lines

my impression is that the immediate 12 Bf4 is more accurate. After 12 Qxe7+ Bxe7 13 Bf4 I believe that Black should challenge the dark-squared bishop with 13...Nh5! (13...Nbd7 transposes to variation 'a' in the notes to Black's 12th move, below). The position remains complex, but my feeling is that Black is better off in these lines than the ones arising after 12 Bf4. Here are a couple of possible continuations:

a) 14 Be3 f5! (preparing ...Bd6 without the fear of Ne4) 15 d6!? Bxd6 16 0-0-0 Be5 17 Bc4 Nd7 18 Bf7+!? Kxf7 (18...Ke7!?) 19 Rxd7+ Ke6 20 Rxb7 Rab8 with a roughly level position.

b) 14 Bc7 hopes for 14...Nd7 15 d6!, but after 14...Kd7! (**Diagram 12**) 15 Bb6 Kd6! (brave and good!) 16 0-0-0 (I can't find anything for White after the tempting 16 Ne4+ Kxd5! 17 0-0-0+ Kc6) 16...f5 17 Re1 Bg5+ 18 Kc2 Nf4!, Black is ready to play ...Nd7 with good piece coordination.

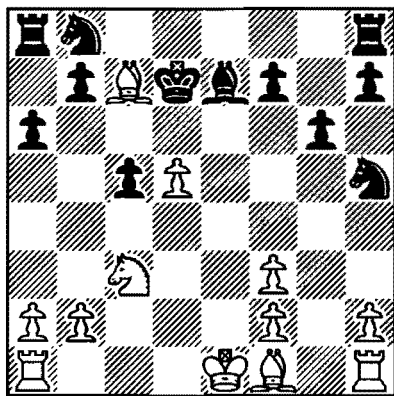


Diagram 12 (W)

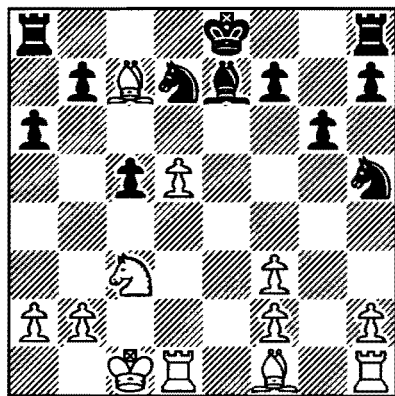


Diagram 13 (B)



**BEWARE!** Instead 15 Bg3 is met by 15...f5!, intending 16 Na4? f4! 17 Nb6+ Kd6 18 Nxa8 Nd7 when it's Black who has the advantage.

### 12...Qxe5+

Black has played two other moves here:

a) 12...Nbd7 may seem like a logical way to continue, but 13 Qxe7+ Bxe7 14 0-0-0 Nh5 15 Bc7! (**Diagram 13**) leaves Black struggling against White's better development, superior piece activity and passed d-pawn. Epishin demonstrated how precarious this position can be for Black when he comfortably defeated a strong

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

grandmaster and renowned Benoni expert: 15...Bd8 (15...0-0 16 d6 Bg5+ 17 Kb1 Nf4 18 Bc4 b5 19 Bd5 Ra7 20 Rhe1, as played in E.Piankov-S.Kovacevic, Cullera 2005, is also very good for White) 16 d6! Nf4 (or 16...Bxc7 17 dxc7 Rc8 18 Nd5!, answering 18...Nh5 with 19 Bh3!) 17 Bc4 0-0 18 Rhe1 Nf6 19 Nd5 N4xd5 20 Bxd5 Bxc7 21 dxc7 Rac8 22 Re7 Ne8 23 Bxb7 Rxc7 24 Rdd7 Rxd7 25 Rxd7 Ng7 26 Bxa6 and White went on to convert his advantage in V.Epishin-N.De Firmian, Minneapolis 2005.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** The idea of ...Nh5 loses much of its attraction if White's bishop is able to remain on the h2-b8 diagonal. Observe how the bishop is safer on c7 if Black's queen's knight is already committed to d7, since there is no concern over a possible ...Kd7, and ...Rc8 can usually be answered very effectively by d5-d6.

b) 12...Nh5!? and now:

b1) 13 Qxe7+ Bxe7 transposes to the note to White's 12th move, above.

b2) 13 Ne4!? (**Diagram 14**) 13...f6 (the exchange sacrifice 13...Nxf4!? also deserves consideration: 14 Qxh8 Nd7 15 d6 Qe6 16 0-0-0 0-0-0 17 Qc3 Qxa2 18 Bc4 Qa4 is very complicated, but I think I prefer White) 14 Qxe7+! (14 Qc7?! Nxf4 15 Qxf4 Nd7 16 0-0-0 0-0-0 17 d6 Qe6 18 Kb1 f5 19 Ng5 Qf6 20 Bc4 Bg7 was just unclear in M.Devereaux-N.Povah, British League 2005 – White must think seriously before allowing his prized bishop to be traded for a knight) 14...Bxe7 15 Be3 and Black faces problems as he cannot defend c5 and guard against d5-d6 at the same time.

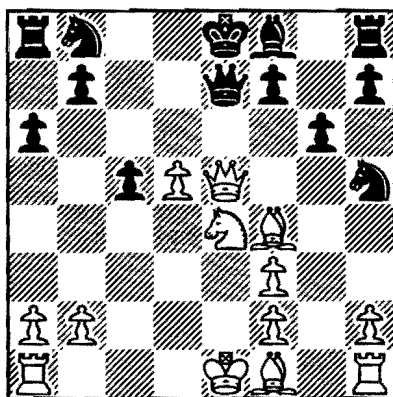


Diagram 14 (B)

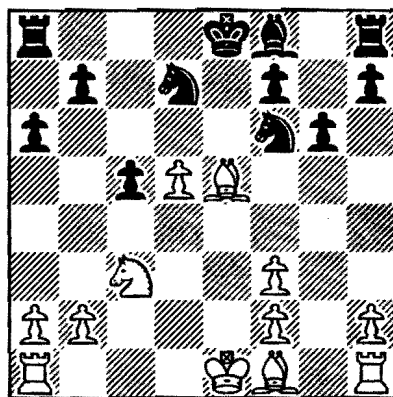


Diagram 15 (W)

b3) 13 0-0-0 Qxe5 (I don't think Black has enough compensation after 13...Nxf4 14 Qxh8 Nd7 15 Qxh7 0-0-0 16 Bh3) 14 Bxe5 looks promising for White, such as after 14...Bh6+ (or 14...f6 15 Bc7 Kd7 16 Bb6 f5 17 Na4!) 15 Kc2 0-0 (planning ...Bf4) 16 Bc7 (White should avoid 16 d6?! Nc6!, but might consider 16 Bd6!?) 16...Nd7 (16...Bf4 17 d6) 17 d6 Nf4 18 Bc4.

### **13 Bxe5 Nbd7 (Diagram 15) 14 Bc7!**

This move, a suggestion by Greenfeld, maintains the bishop on the h2-b8 diagonal which is usually good news for White.

14 f4 has been Epishin's choice, but recently Black seems to have found an answer to it:

a) 14...Bh6 15 Bh3 (15 Ne4 is met by 15...Nxe4! 16 Bxh8 0-0-0) 15...0-0 16 0-0 b5!? 17 Rad1 Ra7 18 Rfe1 Nh5! 19 Bd6 Nxf4! 20 Bxd7 Rxd7 21 Bxf8 Kxf8 was played in J.Rowson-C.Ward, British Championship, Douglas 2005. When I analysed this game for *ChessPublishing.com* I thought that Black had enough compensation for the small material deficit, and I still believe this to be the case.

b) 14...Bg7! 15 Bg2 Nxe5! (15...0-0? 16 0-0 Nh5 17 Bd6! Rfe8 18 Bc7 Ra7 19 Rae1 Rc8 20 d6 offered White a clear advantage in V.Epishin-S.Kovacevic, Seville 2005 – the d6-pawn and the bishop-pair give Black a major headache; Black also doesn't completely solve his problems after 15...0-0 16 0-0 Rhe8 17 Bh3) 16 fxe5 Nh5 17 0-0 Nf4! (crucially this is played now, since otherwise White would have the chance to play f2-f4; White's pawns in the centre look more impressive than they actually are – in reality they are prone to attack) 18 Rae1 0-0-0 19 Re3 Rhe8 20 Rfe1 c4! 21 Bf1 (or 21 Re4 Nd3! 22 Rxc4+ Kb8 when e5 drops and Black is not worse) 21...b5!? (Black could have already got the better of a drawn ending after 21...Nxd5 22 Nxd5 Rxd5 23 Bxc4 Rdx5 24 Rxe5 Rxe5 25 Rxe5 Bxe5) 22 d6 Nd3 23 Bxd3 cxd3 24 Kf1 d2 25 R1e2 Re6 26 Nd1 g5 and White had to play accurately to draw in V.Epishin-J.Degraeve, Bad Wiessee 2006.

There might be some improvements over Epishin's play here, but my general feeling is that Black is okay if he grabs the bishop on e5 and so White should avoid this possibility.

### **14...Bh6**

14...Rc8 is met as usual by 15 d6, while after 14...Bg7 15 Bh3 0-0 White can choose to castle queenside.

### **15 Bh3 0-0**

15...Nh5 16 0-0 f5 is an attempt to block out the light-squared bishop, but it can re-enter the game after 17 Rfe1+! Kf7 18 d6! followed by Bf1.

### **16 0-0 (Diagram 16)**

The d-pawn is strong here and White's two bishops control an awful lot of important squares. Two games have illustrated the problems Black faces:

a) 16...b5 17 Rad1 Ra7 (17...c4!?) 18 d6 Rc8 19 Rfe1 (19 Ne4!) 19...Kf8 20 Ne4! Rxc7

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

21 dxc7 Rxc7 22 Nxf6 Nxf6 23 Rd8+ Kg7 24 Rc8 and White went on to win in G.Spiess-F.Rayner, Leipzig 2006.

b) 16...Rfe8 17 Rfe1 b5 18 d6 Bf4 19 Ne4 Kg7 (**Diagram 17**) 20 Rad1! (not 20 Nxf6 Rxe1+! 21 Rxe1 Nxf6, planning ...Nd5 or ...Ne8) 20...Ne5 21 Kg2 Nfd7 22 Nc3! f5 23 Nd5 Bh6 24 f4! Nc6 25 Kf1 Nd4 26 Bg2 (a turnaround: suddenly it's Black's king's bishop that is out of the game, not White's!) 26...Ne6 27 Ne7 Nxf4 28 Bxa8 and Black resigned in R.Pert-S.Tidman, British League 2006; one possible finish might be 28...Rxa8 29 Nc6 Bg5 30 Re7+! Bxe7 31 dxe7.

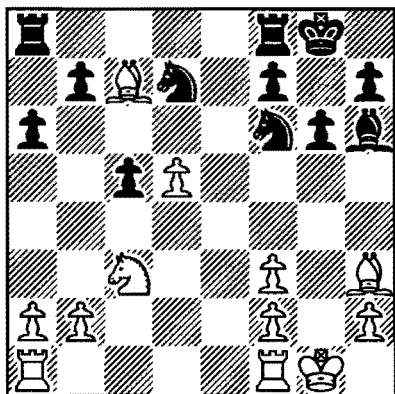


Diagram 16 (B)

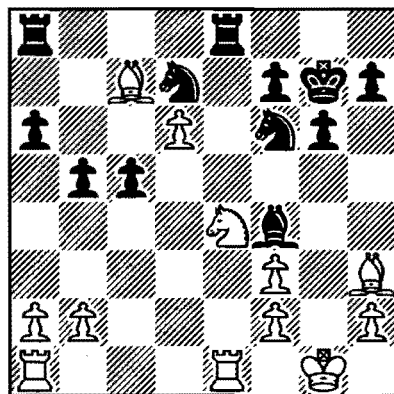


Diagram 17 (W)

B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 a6 8 Qe2 Nbd7 (Diagram 18)

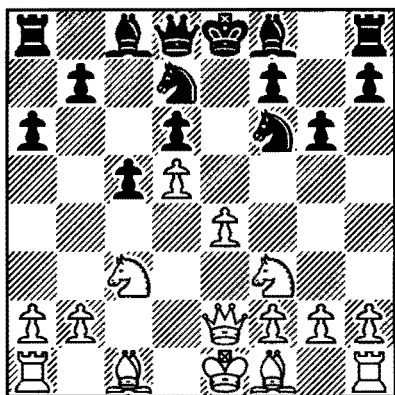


Diagram 18 (W)

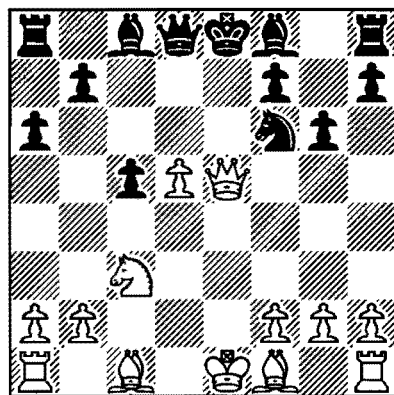


Diagram 19 (B)

Like 8...Bg4, this is another attempt to defuse the e4-e5 push.

## 9 e5

The only other option that really stands out here is 9 Bf4, but following 9...Qe7 I don't see anything better than 10 e5 anyway, transposing after 10...dxe5 11 Nxe5 to the note to White's 11th move.

## 9...dxe5 10 Nxe5 Qe7

Against 10...Be7 White can play 11 Nc4!, and here 11...b5 12 d6 bxc4 13 Bh6! looks very promising. That leaves 10...Nxe5 11 Qxe5+ (**Diagram 19**) as Black's only alternative.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** The plausible 11...Be7?? actually loses, namely to 12 Bg5! 0-0 13 0-0-0! (but not 13 d6??, allowing Black to turn the tables with 13...Bxd6 14 Qxf6 Re8+ 15 Be2 Be7!) 13...Re8 14 d6 Ng4 15 Qxe7!.

So the main continuation is 11...Qe7 12 Bf4 (12 Qxe7+!? Bxe7 13 Bf4 is also possible) 12...Nh5 (alternatively, 12...Nd7?! 13 Qxe7+ Bxe7 14 0-0-0 gave White a clear advantage in V.Suttor-M.Pyke, Australian Championship, Parramatta 2008 – note the dominant bishop on f4 – but 12...Bg7!? seems like a worthwhile alternative for Black) 13 0-0-0 (Greenfeld gives 13 Qxe7+ Bxe7 14 Bh6 Nf6 15 f3 Bf8 16 Bf4, and this also looks better for White) 13...Qxe5 (or 13...Nxf4 14 Qxh8) 14 Bxe5 f6 15 Bc7 Bf5 16 b3! (the king needs an escape square on b2) 16...Kd7 17 Bb6 when Black's pieces, especially the knight on h5, are not ideally placed and I certainly prefer White's position here.

## 11 Nxd7

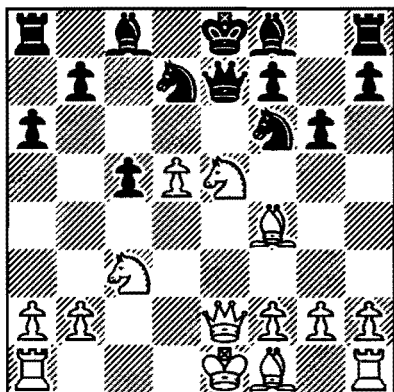
The usual question: does White exchange now or play Bf4 first? It seems from the evidence available that trading first on d7 poses Black the most problems.

After 11 Bf4!? (**Diagram 20**), Black must decide between two options:

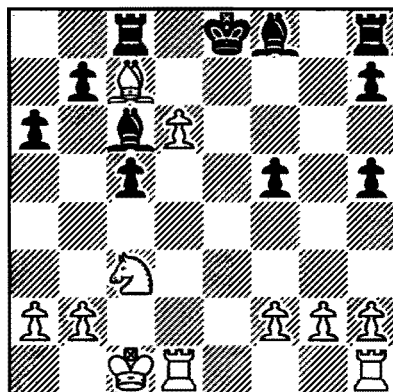
a) 11...Nxe5 12 Bxe5!? (12 Qxe5, transposing to the previous note, is obviously not a bad option) 12...Bg7 13 d6 Qe6 and here 14 Nd5!? may well give White an edge, such as after 14...Nxd5 15 Bxg7 Rg8 16 0-0-0 (16 Be5!?) 16...Rxg7 17 Rxd5.

b) 11...Nh5! (a very good moment to challenge the bishop) 12 Nxd7 Bxd7?! 13 Bc7! (this idea again) 13...Rc8 14 d6 Qxe2+ 15 Bxe2 Bc6 (or 15...Nf6 16 Bf3) 16 Bg4 f5 17 Bxh5 gxf5 18 0-0-0 (**Diagram 21**) left White clearly on top in A.Onischuk-L.Pantsulaia, Turin Olympiad 2006. However, in the recent game M.Devereaux-R.Edouard, Cappelle La Grande 2008, Black demonstrated the way to play: 12...Qxe2+! (instead of 12...Bxd7?!) 13 Bxe2 Nxf4 (of course, getting rid of *that* bishop!) 14 Nb6! (after 14 Nxf8? Black can ignore the trapped knight and continue 14...Nxg2+! 15 Kf1 Nf4!) 14...Rb8 15 Bf3 Be7. Here Devereaux played 16 Rd1 and the position remained very unclear, but not worse for Black in my opinion, after 16...Bf5

17 0-0 Bd8 18 Rfe1+ Kf8 19 Nc4 Nd3 20 Re2 b5. Perhaps White's best bet is instead 16 Nxc8 Rxc8 17 d6!? Bxd6 18 0-0-0 Rd8 19 Rhe1+ Ne6 20 Bxb7 with just a small edge.



**Diagram 20 (B)**



**Diagram 21 (B)**

### 11...Bxd7

11...Qxe2+ 12 Bxe2 Bxd7 13 Bf4 transposes to the main text.

### 12 Bf4

12 Bg5!? is another interesting idea for White.

### 12...Qxe2+

It's possible that Black shouldn't hurry with this queen exchange. Perhaps he should consider 12...0-0-0!? since after 13 0-0-0 Qxe2 14 Bxe2, White's king is committed to the queenside, unlike in the main text. Thus there is no concern over an attack with Rac1 and b2-b4, and the position looks unclear and roughly equal. White has got other options available: 13 Qxe7 Bxe7 14 d6!? Bf8 15 0-0-0 Bc6 is one, although here 16 Be5 can even be met by 16...Ng4!?, planning 17 Bxh8 Nxf2 18 Bf6 Rxd6; maintaining the tension on the e-file by playing 13 Rc1!? is another idea, and this is possibly White's most promising try.

### 13 Bxe2 (Diagram 22)

This position occurred in the game A.Lastin-D.Skorchenko, Belorechensk 2007, which continued:

### 13...0-0-0?!

Black should play 13...Bg7! and then mimic White's decision over which side to castle: 14 0-0-0 0-0-0! or 14 0-0 0-0!. White probably enjoys a small advantage in either case, but the position remains complex and White must be careful not to play without energy because in some cases the d-pawn could even become a li-



ability. One possible line (after 14 0-0-0 0-0-0) is 15 Rhe1 Rhe8 16 Bf3 b5 17 d6, planning to meet 17...Rxe1 18 Rxe1 Re8 with 19 Re7!?

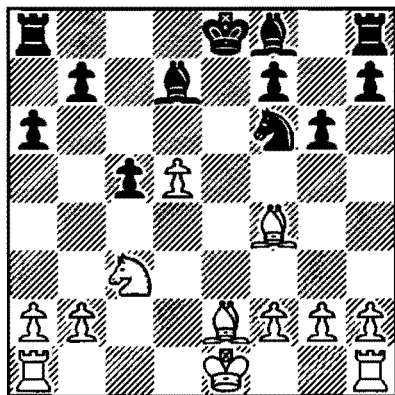


Diagram 22 (B)

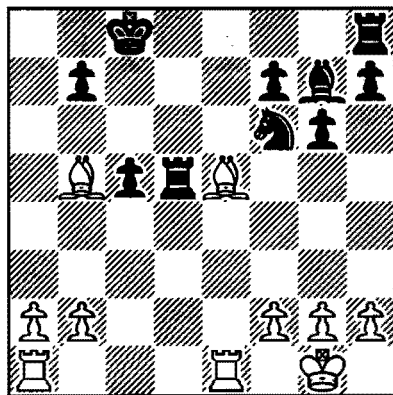


Diagram 23 (B)

14 0-0!



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** White has been angling to castle queenside for such a long time that perhaps Black forgot the shorter version was possible!

The problem for Black is that, with Rac1 and b2-b4 arriving fast, king safety is now a major issue; something which he could have avoided with 13...Bg7!.

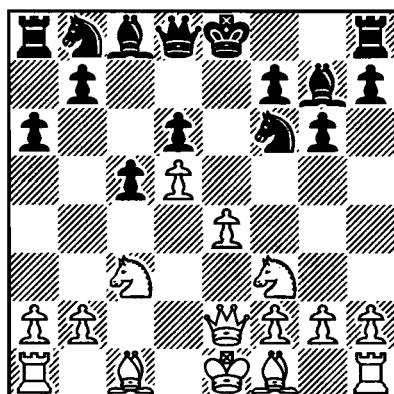
14...Bb5

Black attempts to reduce his problems by forcing some exchanges. This is understandable given the difficulties he would face after, say, 14...Bg7 15 Rac1! Rhe8 16 b4!, but White retains some advantage in any case.

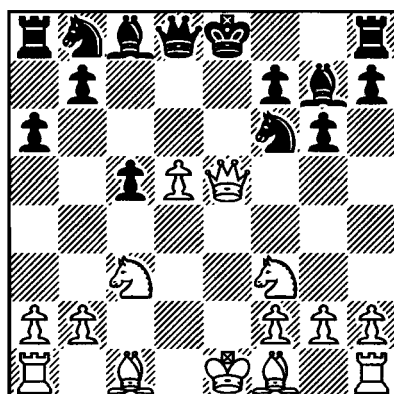
15 Nxg7 axb5 16 Be5 Bg7 17 Bxb5 Rxd5 18 Rfe1 (Diagram 23)

The bishop-pair on an open board, allied to Black's weak pawns on c5 and f7, ensures White of a clear advantage here, and Lastin's accurate play converted this into a win. The game concluded 18...Rhd8 19 Bc4 R5d7 20 Rac1! Ne8 21 Bxg7 Nxg7 22 b4! Rc7 (22...cxb4 23 Be6+) 23 bxc5 Kb8 (23...Rxc5 24 Bxf7) 24 g3 Rdc8 25 Bd5 Ne6 26 Bxe6 fxe6 27 Re5 b6? 28 Rb1! Rxc5 29 Rxb6+ Ka7 30 Rbxe6 Rxe5 31 Rxe5 and, faced with a hopeless rook ending, Black threw in the towel.

C) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 a6 8 Qe2 Bg7!? (Diagram 24)



**Diagram 24 (W)**



**Diagram 25 (B)**

With this natural developing move Black does nothing to resist the idea of e4-e5; in fact he positively encourages it! 8...Bg7 has been played on more than one occasion by the young Bulgarian GM Ivan Cheparinov. He is of course a very strong player in his own right, but his employment of 8...Bg7 gains in significance when you consider that he works closely with Veselin Topalov, who has not been afraid of playing the Modern Benoni himself. At this moment in time Topalov hasn't faced 8 Qe2 in a published game, but it's easy to speculate that 8...Bg7 would be his choice.

## 9 e5!

White has to play this immediately, otherwise Black will simply castle and the queen will just look silly on e2.

## 9...dxe5 10 Qxe5+ (Diagram 25) 10...Kf8!?

10...Qe7 11 Qxe7+ Kxe7 12 Bf4 reaches a queenless middlegame position reminiscent of the ones studied in Lines A and B. My initial reaction was that White enjoys an edge here, and recent games have not caused me to change my mind: for example, 12...Re8 13 0-0-0 Nbd7 14 a4!? b6 15 Bc4 Kf8 16 Rhe1 Bb7 (C.Marzolo-U.Kersten, European Championship, Dresden 2007), and now maybe simply 17 h3, avoiding ...Ng4 and giving the bishop a further square on the diagonal (h2) if required.

## 11 Be2

At this moment in time, e2 is probably the best place for the bishop – on d3 it achieves little other than to block the d-file, while on c4 it is prone to obvious harassment with ...b5. My impression from the evidence is that 11 Be2 offers White the best chance to claim an advantage.

The aggressive and more direct 11 d6!? was played in P.Harikrishna-L.Cheparinov, Pamplona 2005. This is a dangerous option, but Cheparinov's response was convincing and he found a way to equalize: 11...Nbd7 12 Qe3 b5 13 a4 b4 14 Ne4 Bb7! 15 Nxc5 Nxc5 (as pointed out by Richard Palliser, 15...Nd5!? is also quite critical) 16 Qxc5 Nd5 17 Be2 Qd7 18 0-0 Rc8 19 Qa7 Ra8 20 Qc5 Rc8 (**Diagram 26**).

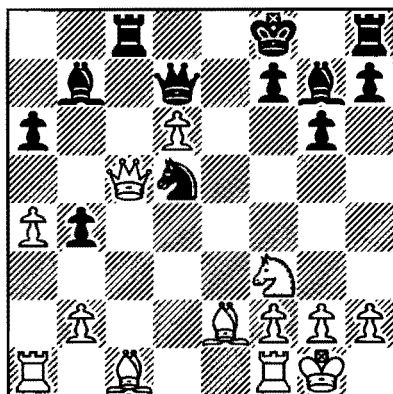


Diagram 26 (W)

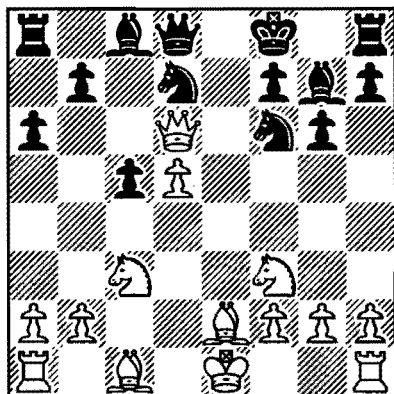


Diagram 27 (B)

Probably White should accept a repetition here with 21 Qa7 Ra8, because in the game he even ended up being a bit worse after 21 Qa5?! Qxd6 22 Rd1 h6 23 Be3 Bf6 24 Bxa6 Qxa6 25 Qxa6 Bxa6 26 Rxd5 Bxb2 27 Rb1 Bc3.

It is also important that White doesn't play too slowly, otherwise Black will manage to unravel comfortably, as he did in J.Woolley-R.Palliser, York (rapid) 2007: 11 Bf4 Nbd7 12 Qc7?! Qxc7 13 Bxc7 b5 14 0-0-0 Bb7 15 Kb1 (without the queens, White struggles for an active plan) 15...h6 16 d6 Kg8 (Black might also consider the more aggressive 16...b4!? 17 Na4 Ne4) 17 Bd3 Kh7 18 Rde1 Rhe8 prepared to meet 19 Re7 with 19...Kg8 20 Rhe1 Bf8, and left Black for preference.

### 11...b5

The most aggressive response, with Black planning to develop harmoniously with ...Bb7 and ...Nbd7, followed by ...h7-h6 in conjunction with ...Kg8-h7.



**BEWARE! Computers tend to really like White's position here – they see only the passed d-pawn and the misplaced king on f8. However, my impression is that it's not quite as straightforward as all that. White definitely does have chances to claim some advantage, but he must play with both energy**

**and accuracy. If Black gets organized his pieces become well coordinated, he achieves counterplay on both wings and he's right back in the game, as we saw happening in Woolley-Palliser.**

11...b5 is certainly not the only move Black can play. Here's a summary of the others, with some analysis:



**DANGEROUS WEAPON: 11...Nxd5?! can be answered very effectively by 12 Bh6! (not 12 Qxd5?? Bxc3+). Black is forced to reply 12...Nf6, but 13 Qxc5+ Kg8 14 Rd1 Nbd7 15 Bf4 certainly looks favourable for White. This idea of meeting ...Nxd5 with Bh6 crops up more than once and is well worth remembering.**

a) 11...Nbd7 12 Qd6+! (**Diagram 27**) exploits the fact that White has avoided Harikrishna's 11 d6. A.Gupta-J.Deepan Chakkravarthy, Visakhapatnam 2006, continued 12...Qe7 13 Bf4 Nh5 14 Qxe7+ Kxe7 15 Bc7 with a typical edge for White. It's a bit strong to classify 12...Qe7 as a mistake, but it does seem a bit inconsistent to play 9...Kf8, instead of 9...Qe7, only to offer a queen trade three moves later. 12...Kg8 is more in the spirit of 8...Bg7, and now I believe that White should prevent ...b5 by playing 13 a4!?. Some possibilities:

a1) 13...b6 14 0-0 Bb7 15 Rd1 Qb8 16 Qxb8+ Rxb8 17 Bf4 Re8 18 Bc4 reaches the sort of queenless position that White is striving for: a strong d-pawn, active pieces and Black's counterplay reduced to a minimum.

a2) 13...Ne8 14 Qg3 Nb6 15 0-0!? (15 Bg5) 15...Nxd5 16 Rd1 looks like a promising pawn sacrifice.

a3) 13...Bf8 14 Qg3 Nb6 15 0-0!? Nbxd5 16 Bc4 and again White enjoys good compensation. In certain variations White should be prepared to give up his d-pawn in return for open lines and a chance to attack Black's uncoordinated position.

b) 11...h6, preparing ...Kg8-h7, was played in the stem game between Epishin and Cheparinov. After 12 0-0 Kg8 White must make a decision:

b1) 13 a4 (it's always desirable to prevent ...b5, and especially so in this line; but the question must always be asked, is worth spending a tempo to do so?) 13...Kh7 14 Bc4 (14 d6!?) 14...Re8 15 Qf4 Nh5 16 Qd2 (**Diagram 28**) 16...Qd6?! 17 Re1! Rxe1+ 18 Qxe1 Bg4 19 Ne4 Qf8 20 Be2 f5? 21 Neg5+! hxg5 22 Nxg5+ Kh8 23 f3 Bd4+ 24 Kh1 Bxf3 25 Nxf3 left Black in all kinds of trouble in V.Epishin-I.Cheparinov, Albacete 2004, but his play can be improved upon at various stages. 16...Bg4!, as suggested by Richard Palliser at [ChessPublishing.com](http://ChessPublishing.com), is a good place to start, and he goes on to give the possible line 17 Be2 Nd7 18 h3 Bxf3 19 Bxf3 Nhf6 20 Qf4 Ne5, which doesn't look bad for Black.

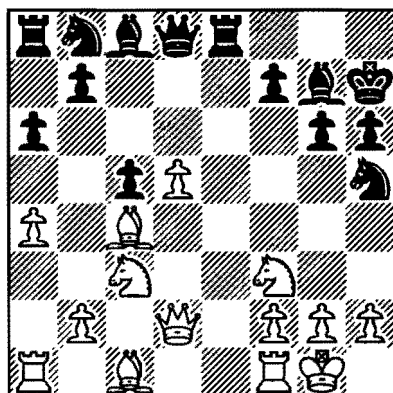


Diagram 28 (B)

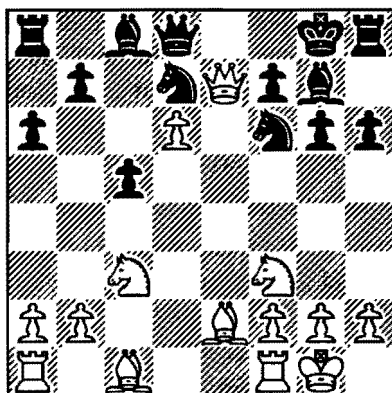


Diagram 29 (B)

b2) 13 d6 Nbd7 14 Qf4 b5 15 a4 b4 16 Ne4 has some similarities to the main text, but there's also the enticing possibility of 14 Qe7!? (**Diagram 29**), a possibility that was not available in Harikrishna-Cheparinov because Black's king was on f8. In some ways the position is on a knife-edge after 14...Qxe7 15 dxe7, in that if White is not careful there's a danger that the pawn on e7 could become isolated. However, I think that this possibility is certainly outweighed by the immediate problems the pawn causes, and I would be very nervous about defending this position. One possible continuation would be 15...Kh7 16 Bc4 Re8 17 Re1 Kg8 18 Bf4 (18 a4!?) 18...b5 (18...Nb6 is met by 19 Nd2!) 19 Bb3 (19 Bd5!? also comes into consideration) 19...c4 20 Bc2 Bb7 21 Rad1 and the pressure continues. Returning to 11...b5 (**Diagram 30**):

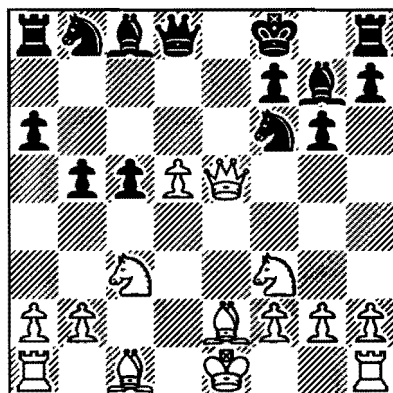


Diagram 30 (W)

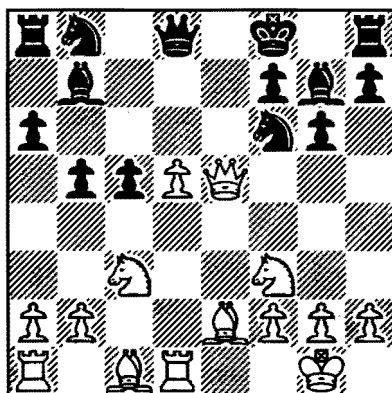


Diagram 31 (B)

### 12 0-0 Bb7 13 Rd1! (Diagram 31)

13 d6 is also possible, but I think it's more accurate to hold back on this advance for the moment. After 13...Nbd7 14 Qf4 h6 15 Rd1 Kg8 followed by ...Kh7, Black is getting coordinated and it's hard for White to make real progress despite the apparent strength of the pawn on d6.

### 13...Nbd7

Black is in no position to grab the d-pawn:

a) If 13...Nxd5? then simply 14 Rxd5 Bxd5 15 Qxd5 Qxd5 16 Nxd5 offers White a very good winning chances. 14 Bh6! also works, after which 14...f6 15 Qe3! Kf7 16 Nxd5 Bxh6 17 Qxh6 Bxd5 18 Ng5+! fxe5 19 Bf3 is a winning line given by Palliser.

b) Against 13...b4 14 Ne4 Nxd5, White again has the possibility of 15 Bh6!, leaving Black in some trouble: for example, 15...f6 16 Rxd5! Bxd5 17 Nxf6 Bxh6 18 Nxd5 with a very strong attack.

### 14 Qf4 h6

Once more the d-pawn is taboo: 14...b4 15 Ne4 Nxd5? 16 Rxd5! Bxd5 17 Qd6+ and 18 Qxd5.

### 15 a4!? (Diagram 32)

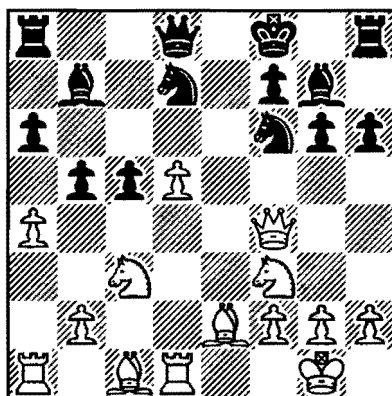


Diagram 32 (B)

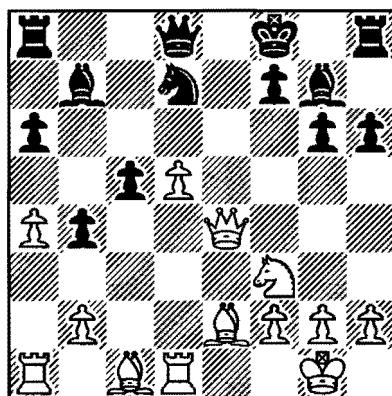


Diagram 33 (B)



**BEWARE!** 15 Be3 Kg8 16 a3 Kh7 17 Ne1 Rc8 (1/2-1/2 F.Doettling-J.Jens, Kemer 2007) demonstrates that pedestrian play leads nowhere and that White's d-pawn is not enough to offer an advantage on its own. Here Black's pieces are well placed, he has chances of counterplay on the queenside, and it's very difficult for White to improve his position.

White needs to probe for a weakness in the black camp – something to hook on to – while Black is still busy getting his position organized, and this is why I suggest 15 a4. Let's see how play could progress from here:

#### **15...b4 16 Ne4 Nxe4**

Against 16...Nxd5? White again has 17 Rxd5 Bxd5 18 Qd6+, while 16...Qb8 17 Nxf6 Bxf6 (or 17...Nxf6 18 Qc4) 18 d6 Kg7 19 Bc4 looks better for White.

#### **17 Qxe4 (Diagram 33)**

White is happy to have traded a pair of minor pieces because his queen is less likely to get hassled in mid-board. Compared to a couple of moves ago, White now has the c4-square available and Black's queenside pawns are compromised – for a start there is a concern over the c5-pawn. These long-term factors mean that White doesn't have to be in a rush to utilize his d-pawn; he can for the moment simply concentrate on massing his forces on their best squares. Furthermore, Black still has a couple more moves to make with ...Kg8-h7 before he is really ready to think about gaining counterplay. It's tight, but all in all I believe White has chances for an advantage in this position after, for example, 17...Qf6 18 Ra2 Re8 19 Qc4 Kg8 20 Be3 Kh7 21 b3, or 17...Bf6 18 Qc2 Kg7 19 Be3.

## **Conclusion**

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First and foremost, there is much to recommend about Epishin's 8 Qe2: it still carries some surprise value; it's very sharp, with careless play by Black likely to be heavily punished; and finally Black hasn't yet found a clear-cut route to equality. It's not all doom and gloom for Black, though. In the critical lines the positions are sometimes difficult to evaluate with 100% certainty. White appears to have an edge, but given the volatile and unbalanced nature of the play it's not a permanent one. In short, both sides have chances of success by outplaying their opponents in the complications.

## Chapter Six

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# A Direct and Powerful h-pawn Advance

1 d4 e6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 Nc3 g6 6 e4 Bg7 7 Bd3 Ne7 8 h4  
(Diagram 1)

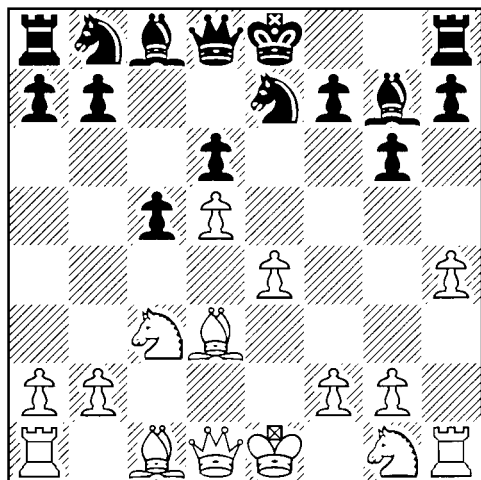


Diagram 1 (B)

The Modern Main Line (MML) has caused a headache for many Modern Benoni players over the past twenty years. I believe that Black has sufficient resources against it (one recent method can be seen in Chapter Four), but some players have



tried to avoid it all together. Indeed, a sideline featuring the delayed development of Black's king's knight has grown in popularity over the past ten or so years.

By omitting an early ...Nf6, Black keeps his options open and may even choose to develop the knight to e7. This idea, first popularized in the mid-late nineties by grandmasters Mikhail Tseitlin and Igor Efimov, isn't so easy to meet and is a reasonable surprise weapon, as no lesser players than Alexander Morozevich and Ruslan Ponomarev have shown. However, if the Modern Main Line player is happy to respond aggressively, I believe that an early h2-h4 casts doubt on the viability of Black's whole set-up with ...Ne7.

Not convinced yet? Well, have a look at how the leading grandmaster Francisco Vallejo Pons fared when hit with by this direct approach.

□ V.Golod ■ F.Vallejo Pons

European Club Cup, Saint Vincent 2005

1 d4 e6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 Nc3 g6 6 e4 Bg7 7 Bd3 (Diagram 2)

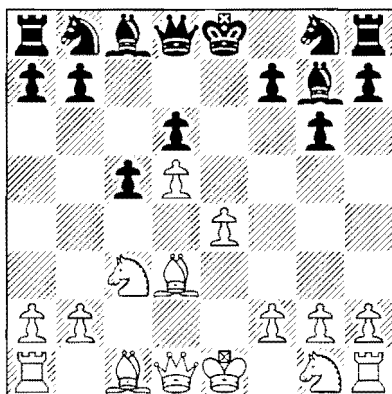


Diagram 2 (B)

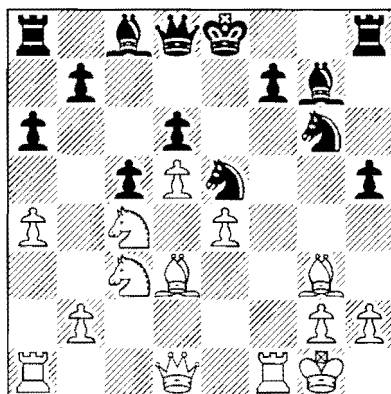


Diagram 3 (W)

7...a6

Black tends to flick this in before going ...Ne7. He doesn't have to, but after 7...Ne7 8 h4! I haven't been able to find any examples of 8...h6?! which should be compared with our main game. Indeed 9 h5 g5 10 f4 gxh4 11 Bxh4 is likely to transpose after 11...a6 12 a4.

8 a4

The standard method of preventing ...b5, although White can also consider 8 Bf4!?, as we will explore in the Looking a Little Deeper section, below.

## 8...Ne7 9 h4

To help us understand what Black's angling for, we should have a quick look at the game V.Mikhalevski-V.Milov, Ajaccio (blitz) 2007: 9 Nf3 h6! 10 0-0 g5 (a standard ploy: Black hopes that his knights will control the position from e5 and g6) 11 Nd2 Nd7 12 Nc4 Ne5 13 f4 gxf4 14 Bxf4 N7g6 15 Bg3 h5! (**Diagram 3**) and having established control over the e5-square, Black was already slightly for choice.

Another point behind Black's system is that he is well placed to meet aggressive-looking set-ups with an early f2-f4. An immediate 7 f4 fails to bring White any advantage, while here 9 f4 0-0 10 Nf3 Bg4 11 0-0 Nd7 12 Re1 Rc8, followed by ...c4, was an excellent illustration of Black's trumps in A.Johannessen-D.King, Gausdal 1990: the absence of a knight from f6 makes it much harder for White to force through his ideal e4-e5 advance.

## 9...h6?!

Vallejo doesn't want to weaken the g5-square with 9...h5, but does want to halt White's h-pawn. His choice fails to impress, although I believe that White stands better in any case, as we will see further below.

## 10 h5! g5 11 f4 (Diagram 4)

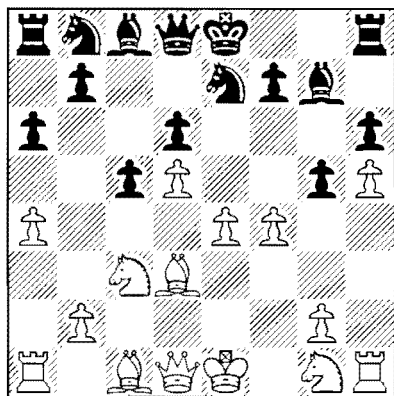


Diagram 4 (B)

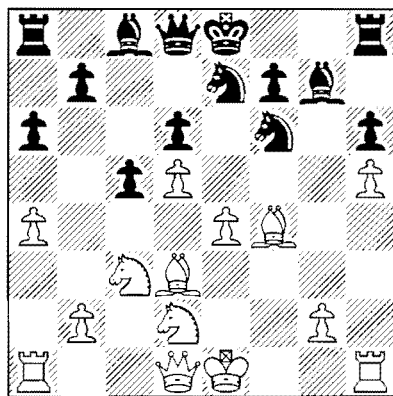


Diagram 5 (B)

A bold but strong decision. Black's control over e5 will increase, but Golod has correctly realized that the weakening of Black's kingside is of more importance.

## 11...gxf4

I don't fully trust the pawn sacrifice 11...g4?! 12 f5 Nd7. The earlier game P.Kiriakov-Y.Pelletier, online blitz 2004, continued 13 Qxg4 Bd4 14 Nf3 Ne5 15 Nxg5 Bxe5 16 Bf4! and White was somewhat better.

## 12 Bxf4 Nd7

Now Black will be unable to meet Nf3 with ...Bg4. He might thus wait with ...Qc7, but White is happy to wait too. Here 13 Qd2 is simple and strong, although I would also be tempted by 13 Qe2!?, with the idea of 13...Nd7 14 Nf3 0-0 15 0-0 Nf6?! 16 e5! with some advantage, as 16...Nxh5?! fails to 17 exd6 Nxf4 18 Qe4 f5 19 Qxf4 Ng6 20 dxc7 Nxf4 21 Bc4 followed by d5-d6.

## 13 Nf3

The point of White's play: Black will be unable to establish a piece on e5. Of course, the d-pawn was taboo: 13 Bxd6? Qb6 with a nasty double threat against the bishop and b2.

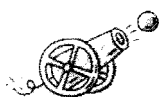
## 13...Nf6 14 Nd2! (Diagram 5)

Standard Benoni fare. White prevents the exchange of his knight after ...Bg4, at the same time as preparing to pressure the d6-pawn.

## 14...Bg4

Remarkably this position was later reached in the game J.De Jong-A.Dardha, Antwerp 2007. That deviated with 14...Ng4, but after 15 Nc4 Ne5 16 Nxe5 dxe5 17 Be3 Qd6 18 a5! White's large advantage was again without question.

## 15 Be2 Bxe2 16 Qxe2 0-0 17 0-0



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** We are just out of the opening phase and already Vallejo is in huge trouble. The h5-pawn clamps his wrecked kingside and he lacks counterplay, while White can steadily exploit those kingside weaknesses.

## 17...Nh7 18 Nc4 Nc8

The fact that Black has to defend d6 thus is a definite sign of how bad things are.

## 19 Ne3!

Golod doesn't do anything radical on the kingside. Instead the simple Nf5 or Ng4 will more than amply increase the pressure.

## 19...Ne7 20 Ng4 Ng5 (Diagram 6) 21 Bxg5!?

Probably even stronger was 21 e5! dxe5 22 Bxe5, but the text is more than good enough.

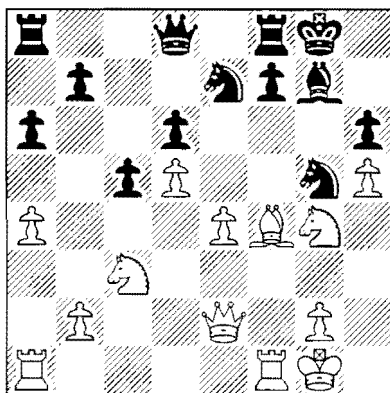
## 21...hxg5 22 e5! dxe5 23 Nf6+!

It's time to lever Black's position open with a powerful sequence of sacrificial blows.

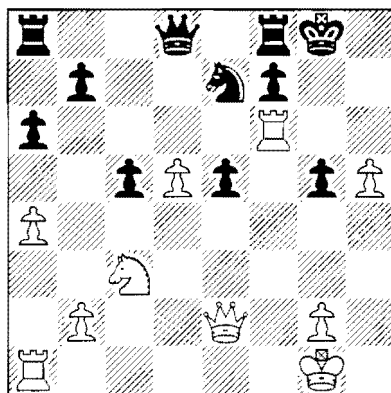
## 23...Bxf6

Not the only defence, but 23...Kh8 was hardly any better: 24 Qxe5 Ng8 25 Nce4 sees White remain in full control of the position and be left free to advance his d-pawn.

**24 Rxf6 (Diagram 7) 24...Nxd5!**



**Diagram 6 (W)**



**Diagram 7 (B)**

This seemingly greedy defence was the only option: Black has to activate his queen. Otherwise g5 would have dropped off with fatal consequences, such as after 24...Ng6? 25 Ne4 Nf4 26 Qg4 (Golod).

**25 Nxd5 Qxd5 26 Rd1 Qb3 27 Rd3 Qc4**

Essential as Black had to stay on the rook. Instead 27...Qxa4? 28 Qxe5 Qg4 29 Rh6 would have forced mate after 29...f6 30 Qe7 Rf7 31 Rg6+ Kh8 32 Qxf7.

**28 b3 Qh4 29 g3!**

Golod reveals in his notes that he had seen this powerful follow-up prior to playing 22 e5. That's impressive vision and now Black is totally lost.

**29...Qb4**

White's main point is that 29...Qh3 30 g4 Qh4 31 Kg2 leaves Black's queen trapped and about to be won.

**30 Qxe5 Qg4 (Diagram 8) 31 h6**

Not bad, but it's surprising that Golod missed 31 Rh6 f6 which would have led to mate after either 32 Qe7 or 32 Rg6+.

**31...Kh7 32 Rxa6?**

Only this jeopardizes the win. Once again one would normally expect a player of Golod's ability to find 32 Rf2! in the blink of an eye. After 32...Rg8 (it's mate too after 32...f6 33 Qe7+ Kxh6 34 Rh2+) 33 Rxf7+ Black is helpless in view of the switch-back 33...Kg6 34 Rd6+ Kh5 35 Rf2 followed by mate. It should be noted that the flashy 32 Rd7 Qxd7 33 Rd6 would also have forced resignation, and one has to assume that White was already chronically low on time.

32...f6 33 Rxf6 Rxf6 34 Qxf6 Rg8 35 Qf7+ Kh8 36 Qf6+ Kh7 37 Qf7+ Kh8 38 Qe7?

No doubt thrown by the fact that the game was still in progress, Golod makes a further error. After the text Vallejo's queen resurfaces, whereas either 38 Qxb7 or 38 a5! would have retained a likely decisive advantage, as pointed out by Golod.

38...Qf5 39 Re3 g4 40 Re5 Qf3 41 Re3 Qd1+ 42 Re1 Qd4+ 43 Kg2 Qd2+ 44 Kg1 Qd4+ 45 Re3 Qd1+ 46 Kg2 Qd2+ 47 Re2 Qxh6 48 Kg1 Qc1+ 49 Re1 Qg5 50 Qxb7 Rf8 51 Qe4 Qf6 (Diagram 9) 52 Qe5?

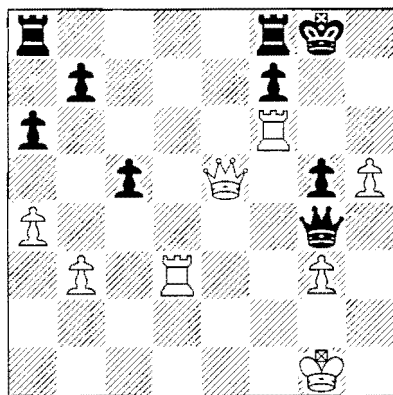


Diagram 8 (W)

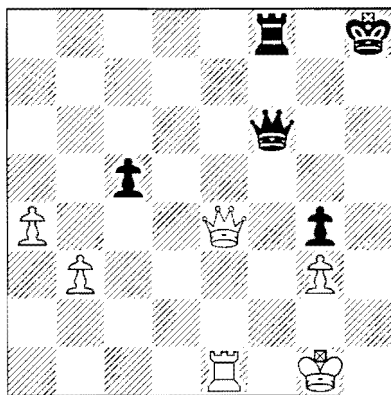


Diagram 9 (W)

Making progress was no longer easy, but this is a further slip. Black's active pieces now ensure that he is never in any real danger in the rook endgame.

52...Qxe5 53 Rxe5 Rf3 54 Kg2 Rxb3 55 Rxc5 Rb4! 56 Ra5 Kg7 57 Ra6 Rb2+ 58 Kf1 Rb3 59 Kf2 Ra3

No doubt frustrated by the turn of events, Golod now tortured Black for a further thirty moves, but the position is a theoretical draw.

60 a5 Rf3+ 61 Kg2 Ra3 62 Ra8 Ra2+ 63 Kf1 Ra3 64 Kf2 Rf3+ 65 Kg2 Ra3 66 a6 Ra2+ 67 Kf1 Ra3 68 Kf2 Rf3+ 69 Kg2 Ra3 70 a7 Ra4 71 Kf1 Ra3 72 Kf2 Kh7 73 Ke2 Kg7 74 Kd2 Kh7 75 Kc2 Kg7 76 Kb2 Ra6 77 Kc3 Ra4 78 Kb3 Ra1 79 Kc4 Ra2 80 Kd5 Ra1 81 Ke5 Ra2 82 Kf5 Ra4 83 Kg5 Kh7 84 Kf6 Ra5 85 Re8 Rxa7 86 Re7+ Rxe7 87 Kxe7 Kg6 88 Ke6 Kg5 89 Ke5 Kg6 90 Kf4 Kf6 91 Kxg4 Kg6 92 Kf4 1/2-1/2

A tragedy for the Israeli grandmaster and something of a let-off for the 2680-rated Spanish no.1. Still, White's rapid h-pawn advance appeared to catch Vallejo off-guard and quickly led to a large advantage.

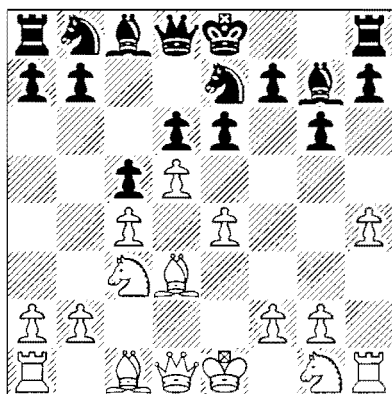
## Looking A Little Deeper

1 d4 e6

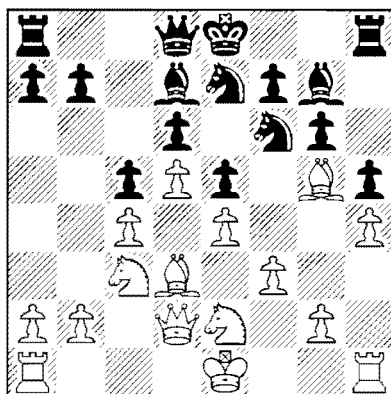


**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** Black doesn't have to begin with 1...c5 or 1...e6. He might also adopt a Modern move order and via 1...g6 2 c4 Bg7 3 e4 c5 4 d5 d6 5 Nc3 e6 6 Bd3 exd5 7 cxd5 Ne7 8 h4 we've again reached our key position.

Depending on his repertoire, White may, of course, meet the Modern in some other way, but in this move order an immediate 6...Ne7!? is also an option, and after 7 h4! (**Diagram 10**) we have:



**Diagram 10 (B)**



**Diagram 11 (W)**

- a) 7...exd5 8 cxd5 transposes to Line A, below.
- b) 7...h6 is no longer so silly as Black retains the option of closing the centre with ...e5. That said, 8 Be3 Nd7 9 Nf3 a6 10 Qd2 e5 11 h5! gave White the upper hand in V.Erdos-V.Nevednichy, Nagykanizsa 2003. Black's problem is that 11...g5 leaves him with a strategically bad position. After 12 Ng1 (an immediate 12 a3!? and b2-b4 is tempting too) 12...Nf6 13 f3 White might play to open the kingside with g3 and f4, but he should be happy enough to exploit Black's lack of kingside counterplay by advancing on the queenside.
- c) 7...h5 8 Bg5 (Shariyazdanov's logical suggestion of 8 dxe6!? Bxe6 9 Bg5 could do with a test or two) 8...e5 (prudent) 9 Nge2 Nd7 10 Qd2 Nf6 11 f3 and now:
  - c1) White's spatial advantage saw him retain a pull after 11...a6 12 Nd1! Nh7 13 Bh6 Bf6 14 g3 Bd7 15 Nf2 Rb8 16 b4! in B.Avrukh-I.Ivanisevic, Istanbul Olympiad 2000.

c2) Black has also tried 11...Bd7 (**Diagram 11**) when I still like the Avrukh regrouping plan of 12 Nd1!, preparing to seize the queenside initiative in the event of 12...a6 13 b4.

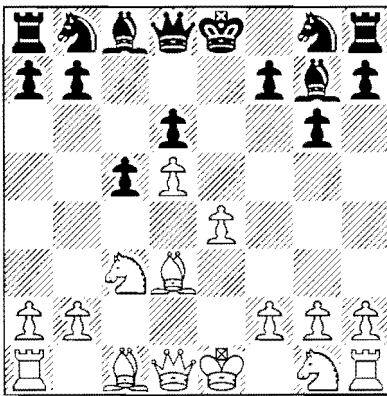


**ROLL THE DICE! White can also play somewhat more ambitiously with 12 0-0-0! a6 13 Rdf1, leading to a much more double-edged position.**

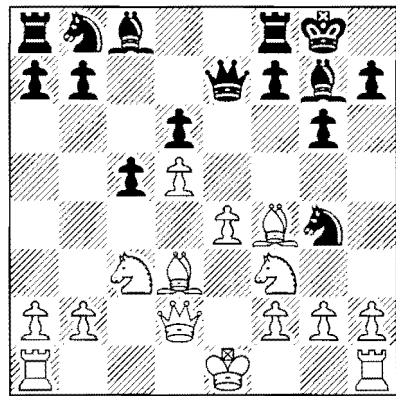
A.Shariyazdanov-A.Minasian, Dubai 2001, continued 13...Qa5 14 Kb1 b5 15 g4 hxg4?! 16 Bxf6! Bxf6 17 fxg4 Bxh4 18 Qg5!, which saw the kingside open and after 18...Rh5! 19 Rxh4! Rxg5 20 Rh8+ Ng8 21 Rxg8+ Ke7 22 Rxa8 b4 23 Nd1 White's pieces were probably superior to Black's extra queen in this fascinating position. However, Minasian's play was a little compliant and, as pointed out in Shariyazdanov's notes in *Informant 81*, Black should have preferred 15...bxc4 16 Bxc4 Rb8 when anything might have happened.

Returning to a 1...e6 move order:

**2 c4 c5 3 d5 exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 Nc3 g6 6 e4 Bg7 7 Bd3 (Diagram 12)**



**Diagram 12 (B)**



**Diagram 13 (W)**

Now 7...Nf6 would take play into the Modern Main Line, but exponents of that variation should also be ready for:

**A: 7...Ne7**

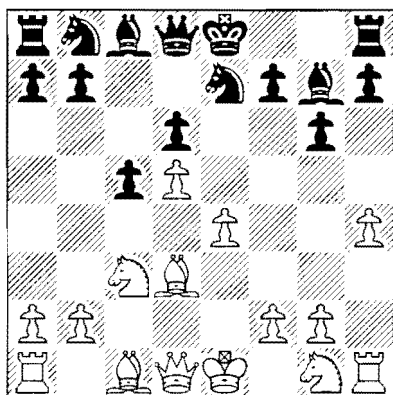
**B: 7...a6 8 a4 Ne7**

I should note too that the knight's remaining deployment with 7...Nh6?! fails to

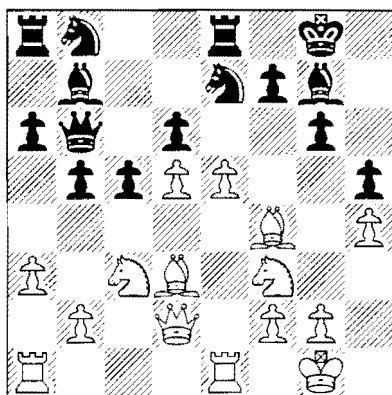
convince, despite having been played several times by the Hungarians Gellert Papp and Emil Szalanczy. After 8 Bf4! (preparing to target the knight; 8 h4!? is also pretty tempting, but after 8...Qe7 9 Nge2 a6 10 a4 Nd7 11 h5 Ne5 12 Bc2 g5! 13 f3 b6 14 0-0 White was only a little better in V.Krutti-E.Szurovsky, Miskolc 1997) 8...0-0 (Black must lose time with his knight, as it can't hide on f7: 8...f6?! 9 Bb5+! Bd7 10 Bxd6 Qb6 11 Bxd7+ Nxd7 12 Bf4 left Black's position a complete wreck in D.Berczes-G.Papp, Budapest 2006) 9 Qd2 Ng4 10 Nf3 Qe7 (**Diagram 13**) 11 h3 Ne5 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 13 Bg5 Bf6 14 Bh6 Bg7 15 Bxg7 Kxg7 16 0-0 White had reached a favourable version of an MML (f2-f4 is next up) in B.Chatalbashev-H.Hamdouchi, Calvi 2005.

Black might also flick in 7...a6 8 a4 before going 8...Nh6?!, but this doesn't change much: 9 Bf4 0-0 10 Qd2 Ng4 11 Nf3 Qe7 (P.Varga-E.Szalanczy, Hungarian League 1996) 12 h3 Ne5 13 Nxe5 Bxe5 14 Bg5, again with a pleasant advantage.

**A) 1 d4 e6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 Nc3 g6 6 e4 Bg7 7 Bd3 Ne7 8 h4 (Diagram 14)**



**Diagram 14 (B)**



**Diagram 15 (B)**

## 8...h5

Black usually elects to halt the h-pawn thus, but not everyone is so keen to weaken the g5-square:

a) 8...a6 9 a4 transposes to Line B.

b) 8...h6?! 9 h5! was considered in the notes to Golod-Vallejo.

c) The bold 8...0-0 also fails to solve Black's problems: 9 h5 Nd7 10 Nf3 (probably the best deployment; however, I must also mention a game from 1966 (!): 10 Nge2!? Rb8 11 a4 a6 12 Ng3 Qc7 13 f4 c4 14 Bc2 b5 15 axb5 axb5 16 e5! and White had a serious attack, albeit in a rather double-edged position in J.Gromek-R.Grabczewski, Polish Championship, Rzeszow 1966) 10...Nf6 11 hxg6 fxg6



White gains good attacking chances in the event of 11...hxg6 and then either 12 Ng5 or 12 Bg5! highlighted Black's kingside weaknesses and left White with the upper hand in B.Avrukh-D.Gershkovich, Tel Aviv 2001.

### 9 Bf4!?

An attempt to exploit Black's move order by making ...Nd7-e5 hard to implement. I quite like this approach, although 9 Bg5 is also promising and will probably transpose to the main line of Line B after the likely inclusion of ...a6 and a4.

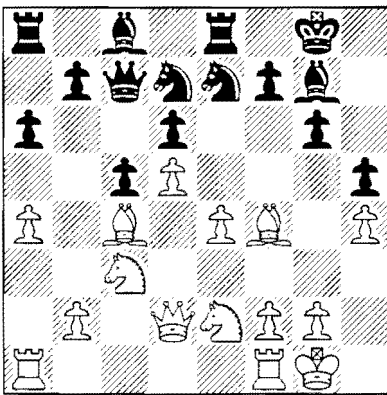
### 9...0-0 10 Qd2 a6 11 a4

Very logical, but just as in the anti-MML (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 Nf3 g6 7 e4 a6), White can also allow ...b5 and still fight for the advantage. 11 Nf3!? transposes to M.Van der Werf-R.Hendriks, Dieren 2006, which continued 11...Re8 12 0-0 b5 13 a3 (prudent as there's no need to allow the black pawns to continue to advance; furthermore, White may now consider playing on the queenside himself with b2-b4) 13...Bb7 (Black might try to prepare ...Nd7 with 13...Qb6, but that allows White a pleasant choice between 14 e5 and 14 b4 Nd7 15 Rac1, with an edge in both cases, partly due to the slightly misplaced knight on e7) 14 Rfe1 Qb6 15 e5! (**Diagram 15**) 15...Nxd5 (Black is also in some trouble after 15...dxe5 16 Nxe5 Rd8 17 Bg5! since 17...f6 18 Nxg6 Nxg6 19 Re6 Rd6 20 Bxg6 leads to a vicious attack), and now the simple 16 Nxd5 Bxd5 17 Bxb5 axb5 18 Qxd5 Qc6 19 Qxd6 Qxd6 20 exd6 with some advantage due to the extra, passed d-pawn should really have been preferred to Van der Werf's more speculative 16 e6!? Rxe6 17 Rxe6 fxe6 18 Ng5.

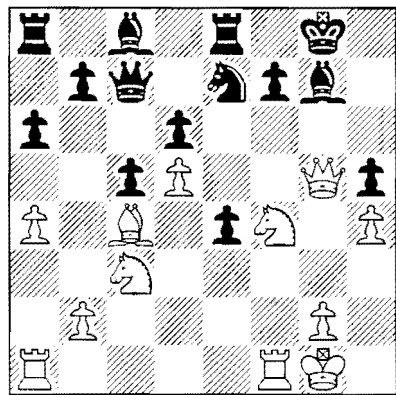
### 11...Re8 12 Nge2 Qc7 13 Bc4!

Preventing any counterplay with ...c4 and ...Nd7-c5.

### 13...Nd7 14 0-0 (**Diagram 16**)



**Diagram 16 (B)**



**Diagram 17 (B)**

### 14...Ne5?!

Criticized by Kaidanov in view of White's forcing response, but as he points out 14...Nb6 15 b3 also leaves White with some advantage.

**15 Bxe5! Bxe5 16 f4**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** It is rare to see White give up his dark-squared bishop for a knight in a Modern Benoni structure, but here his attack is simply too strong with f4-f5 next up.

**16...Bg7**

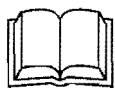
Neither would 16...Bh8 have saved Black after 17 f5 Kh7 18 Qg5, followed by Nf4, as pointed out by Kaidanov, while 16...Bf6 17 f5 is also strong since 17...Bxh4? (as in the game, 17...gxf5 is a better try, but also one unlikely to be sufficient after 18 Qh6 when h5 will fall) fails to 18 f6.

**17 f5! gxf5 18 Qg5 fxe4 19 Nf4 (Diagram 17)**

White has an extremely powerful attack. G.Kaidanov-A.Ivanov, New York 1990, continued 19...Bg4 (Kaidanov's notes in *Informant* 50 don't mention 19...Ng6!?, but perhaps this was a better try, although I still rather like White's kingside prospects after 20 Nxg6 Bg4! 21 Be2! – the tricky point is that 21 Nf4?? Re5 traps the queen – 21...Bxe2 22 Nxe2 fxe6 23 Qxg6 e3 24 Rf5) 20 Nxe4 Ng6 21 Ne6! and Black's position quickly collapsed.

**B) 1 d4 e6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 exd5 4 cxd5 d6 5 e4 g6 6 Nc3 Bg7 7 Bd3 a6 8 a4**

Standard, but by no means forced and some readers may wish to consider 8 Bf4!? (**Diagram 18**), as White played just a couple of weeks before Golod-Vallejo in A.Dreev-F.Vallejo Pons, Spanish Team Championship 2005. Vallejo realized the danger of allowing a quick e4-e5, and so took play into standard Modern Benoni waters with 8...Nf6.



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** Dreev-Vallejo continued 9 h3 0-0 10 Nf3 b5 11 0-0, which is a variation of the so-called anti-Modern Main Line, more usually reached via 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 d6 6 e4 g6 7 Nf3 a6 8 h3 b5 9 Bd3 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bf4.

After 8 Bf4 Black doesn't have to play ...Nf6; his two independent options are:  
a) 8...b5 9 Nf3 Bg4 (9...Nf6 10 h3 once again leads to the anti-MML) 10 0-0 and now:

a1) The consistently-ambitious 10...Qf6!? is the only move to have been tested: 11 Bg3 (**Diagram 19**) 11...c4?! (this fails to convince; Black probably has to take his chances after 11...Bxf3 12 gxf3 Nd7 13 f4, although I would certainly be happy with White's initiative here) 12 Be2 Bxf3 13 Bxf3 (an immediate 13 e5! might be

even stronger: Black's line-up of pieces down the a1-h8 diagonal prevents him from capturing on e2, but 13...dxe5 14 Bxf3 Nd7 15 d6 doesn't look at all pleasant for him) 13...Nd7 14 e5! Nxe5 15 Bxe5 dxe5 and now as well as the 16 d6 Rd8 17 Bc6+ of E.Porper-A.Sitnikov, Elkana 2007, 16 a4!? deserves serious attention, with advantage to White in both cases.

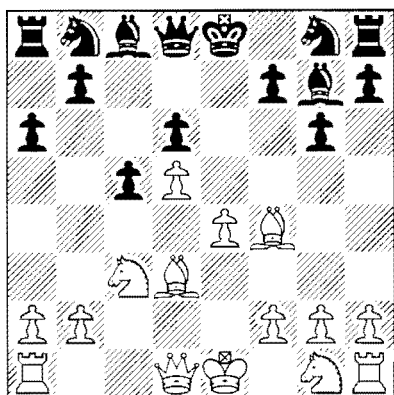


Diagram 18 (B)

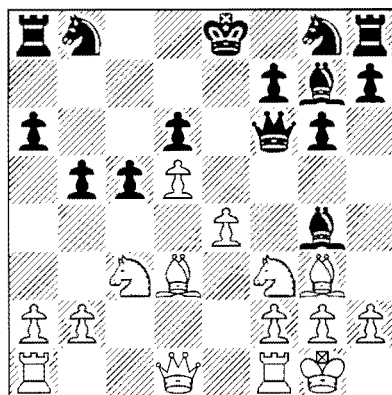


Diagram 19 (B)

a2) Following 10...Nf6 11 Bxd6! Qxd6 12 e5 Qd8 remarkably play has transposed to the game L.Wu-R.Palliser, British League 2004. That came about via a Modern Benoni move order and I can recall cursing my early ...Bg4 because White had seized the initiative with his forceful play. After 13 exf6 Bxf6 14 Re1+ Kf8 15 h3 Bc8!? (the passed d-pawn quickly becomes quite potent in the event of 15...Bxf3 16 Qxf3 Nd7 17 d6 Ne5 18 Qd5) 16 Ne4 Bb7 17 Nxf6 Qxf6 I was suffering and now 18 Ne5!? might have been even stronger than the game's 18 Be4.

b) 8...Ne7 is probably more of a challenge for White's independent approach. Now I wonder about 9 Qd2!?, intending both 9...b5 10 Bh6 and 9...h6 10 h4 with perhaps a small advantage in both cases, albeit in rather complex positions.

Thus 8 Bf4 deserves attention, but there is most certainly nothing wrong with halting ...b5 with 8 a4 (**Diagram 20**):

### 8...Ne7

Black's main alternative to 8...Nf6, but he has also punted some even rarer alternatives on occasion:

- The unconvincing 8...Nh6?! 9 Bf4 was seen just prior to Line A, above.
- The extremely ambitious 8...Qe7 9 h3 (side-stepping 9 Nf3 Bg4 and getting ready to transpose to an MML after 9...Nf6) 9...f5? was tried in J.Stock-T.Tolnai, Budapest 1998. However, after 10 Nf3! (**Diagram 21**) 10...fxe4 (Tsesarsky points out the justification of White's play: 10...Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 fxe4 12 0-0 Nf6 13 Re1 0-0 14

Bh6 Re8 15 Ng5 when he claims an edge, but surely White has even more than that; I should also mention the line 13...Bf5 14 g4 Bd7 15 Bh6 with 16 Ng5 next up and a massacre in prospect) 11 Nxe4 Nf6 12 0-0 Nxe4 13 Re1 0-0 (White is also somewhat better after 13...Bf5 14 Bxe4 Bxe4 15 Bg5 Bf6 16 Bxf6 Qxf6 17 Rxe4+) 14 Rxe4 Qf7 15 Bg5 all that Black had achieved was to open the position greatly to White's advantage.

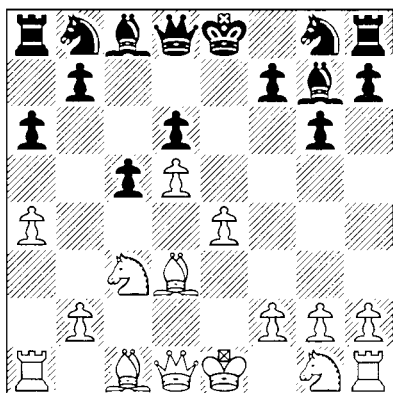


Diagram 20 (B)

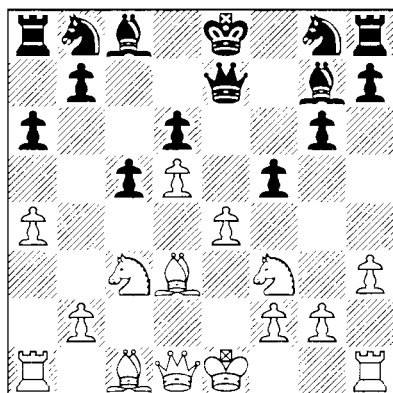


Diagram 21 (B)

c) The flexible 8...Nd7!? is a small problem for our favourite plan. Now 9 h4 is met by 9...Ngf6 and 9 f4 Ngf6 is also rather unconvincing. White must thus proceed more slowly, but he should still be able to gain an edge by targeting the undefended d6-pawn: 9 Nf3 Ne7 (9...Ngf6 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bf4 is once again a transposition to the MML) 10 0-0 (I'd be tempted to start with an immediate 10 Bf4, not that this should make a huge difference) 10...0-0 (had Black not played ...Nd7, he could meet Bf4 with ...h6 and ...g5, but here that plan is insufficient to equalize: 10...h6 11 Bf4 Qc7 12 h4! 0-0 13 Qd2 Kh7 14 Rac1 with an edge since White is always happy to trade pieces on e5) 11 Bf4! (**Diagram 22**) 11...Nf6 (now we reach an MML-type position, but with Black's second knight on e7 where it doesn't achieve too much; however, 11...Qc7 12 h3 h6 13 Bh2! f6 14 Nd2 was also a little better for White in C.Ionescu-L.Filip, Baile Tusnad 1999) 12 h3 (essential prophylaxis and now Black suffers from a typical Benoni problem: there isn't a great role for his light-squared bishop) 12...Ne8 13 Re1 Kh8 14 Bf1 (patient; more aggressive souls would probably prefer 14 e5!?) 14...b6 15 Qd2 f6 16 Rab1! prepared b2-b4 and favoured White in I.Novikov-I.Rajlich, Koszalin 1998.

## 9 h4 (Diagram 23) 9...h5

Just as in Line A, blocking the h-pawn's further advance has been Black's most popular choice, but practice has also seen:

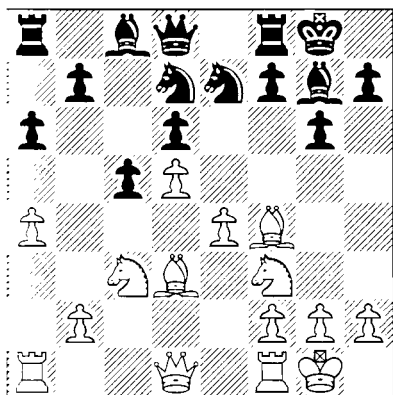


Diagram 22 (B)

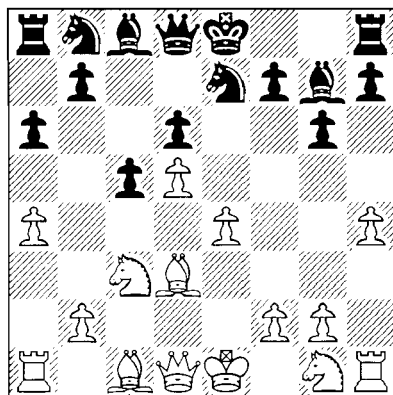


Diagram 23 (B)

9...h6 was the subject of Golod-Vallejo.

9...0-0 10 h5 should be compared with note 'c' to Black's 8th move in Line A. Here Shariyazdanov mentions the line 10...f5 11 hxg6 hxg6 12 Bh6 with an attack, and I also quite like White's kingside chances after 12 Nf3.

9...Nd7 10 h5 Ne5 (or 10...Qc7 11 Nf3 Rb8 12 Bf4 f6 13 Nd2 Ne5 14 Bxe5! fxe5 when 15 Qf3!? is tempting, not that 15 Nc4 Bd7 16 a5 Bb5 17 Nb6 didn't give White a pretty pleasant advantage in I.Farago-H.Nagel, Latschach 2001) 11 Be2 f5 12 Nh3! (**Diagram 24**) appears to favour White. The knight will cause problems from either f4 or g5, and after 12...0-0 (Black preferred 12...Bd7!? 13 Nf4 0-0 14 hxg6 hxg6 in D.Antic-E.Anka, Las Vegas 2006; now, as well as the game's 15 Ra3, both 15 0-0 and 15 Ne6!? deserve attention: the former looks good enough for an edge, while the latter sees White either support e6 in the event of 15...Bxe6 16 dxe6 Nxe4 17 Nxe4 d5 18 Ng5 or pick up an exchange following 16...Rf6?! 17 Bg5 Rxe6 18 Bxf5 gxf5 19 Nd5) 13 hxg6 N7xg6 14 Ng5 fxe4 15 Nxh7 Bf5 (this fails to convince, but 15...Rf5 16 Nxe4 Nf4 17 Bxf4 Rxf4 18 Nhg5 Bf5 19 f3 would have maintained sufficient control and an extra pawn for White) 16 Nxf8 Qxf8 Black didn't have enough for the exchange in T.Kononenko-I.Rajlich, Ekaterinburg 2006: White's king would have been safe enough after 17 Kf1.

### 10 Bg5

Exploiting the weakened g5-square, but this isn't the only route to a likely edge:

a) 10 Bf4 should be closely compared with the main line of Line A. Indeed, after 10...0-0 11 Qd2 play has directly transposed to it.

b) The 10 Nge2!? Nd7 11 0-0 Ne5 12 Rb1 (**Diagram 25**) of A.Rustemov-P.Garcia Castro, Spanish Team Championship 2003, is a decent positional idea. White will

open the queenside with b2-b4 and relies on the fact that ...f5 will be quite a risky advance because of Bg5 and/or Nf4-e6.

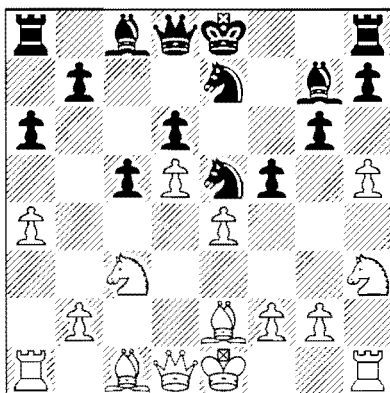


Diagram 24 (B)

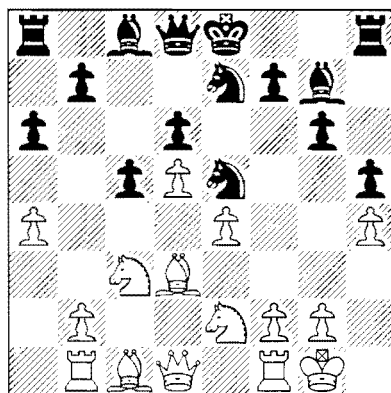


Diagram 25 (B)

c) More aggressive souls may wish to consider the untried 10 Nh3!? Nd7 11 Ng5 Ne5 12 0-0 0-0 13 Be2, followed by arranging the f2-f4 advance.

## 10...Nd7

Already Black can't afford to be careless. Here 10...Qc7?! 11 Qd2 Nd7 12 Nf3 left him unable to castle in A.Shariyazdanov-P.Kotsur, Tula 2001. Following 12...Ng8 13 0-0 Ngf6 14 Rae1! Ng4?! the thematic Benoni sacrifice 15 e5! dxe5 16 Bc4 Nb6 17 Ba2 Bf5 18 d6 levered open the position to White's significant benefit.

## 11 Nf3 0-0

The relatively-solid 11...Ne5 was preferred in A.Huzman-V.Ruban, Antwerp 1993. After 12 Nxe5 Bxe5 13 Qd2 (Diagram 26) 13...0-0 (W.Paschall-Z.Medvegy, Budapest 2004 deviated with 13...Bg7 14 0-0 Rb8 15 Rae1 0-0 when one might well assume that Black's higher rating got him out of trouble as a draw was agreed here: 16 Bh6 Bd7 17 Bxg7 Kxg7 18 f4 would have left White well massed to attack) 14 0-0 one has to agree with NCO (a highly-respected source which both mentions Black's ...Ne7 idea and approves of our aggressive counter) that White is better; an assessment which the further 14...f5 15 Rfe1 Qc7 16 Bc4!, preparing an exchange sacrifice on e5, did nothing to disprove.

## 12 Qd2

White might also keep this square free for his knight, and after 12 0-0 Nf6 (12...Ne5 13 Nxe5 Bxe5 14 Qd2 Bd7 15 Bf4 gives White an edge too) 13 Nd2 Ng4 14 Nc4 f6 15 Bf4 Ne5 16 Nxe5 fxe5 17 Bg5 Rf7 18 Qd2 Bd7 19 a5! the weakness of the g5-square was evident in G.Kovacs-D.Bogdan, Hungarian League 2007.

### 12...Nf6 13 0-0

Castling after the inclusion of both h4 and ...h5 is perfectly safe. White isn't worried by ...Bg4 as he doesn't mind moving his knight and then pushing f2-f4.

### 13...Kh8

Black tries to regroup. This allows White to force a favourable exchange, but 13...Bd7 14 Qf4 Ne8 15 Qg3, followed by Nd2-c4 and/or f2-f4, would also have been rather uncomfortable for the second player.

### 14 Bxf6! Bxf6 15 Qh6+ Kg8 16 Ng5 Bxg5 17 Qxg5 (Diagram 27)

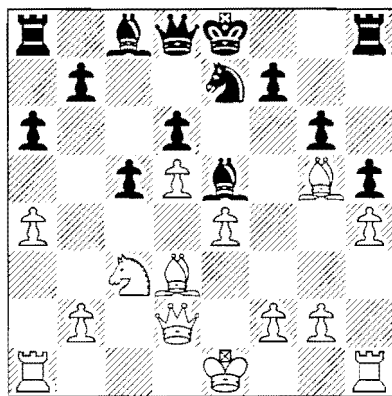


Diagram 26 (B)

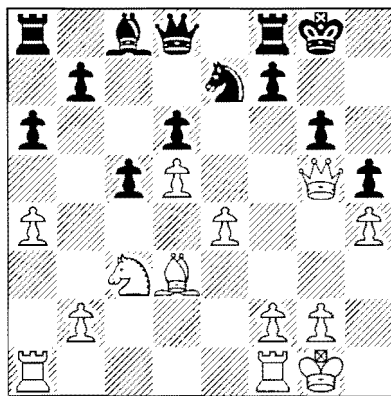


Diagram 27 (B)

White has exchanged off Black's two best-placed minor pieces. The game R.Vera-D.Moldovan, Andorra 2002, continued 17...Kg7 18 Rab1!? Bd7 19 b4 Rc8 20 bxc5 Rxc5 21 Ne2! Bc8 22 Nf4 with some advantage.

## Conclusion

Handling a Modern Benoni structure but with the king's knight on e7 isn't so easy if White is taken by surprise. However, the Modern Main Line exponent who is aware of our critical h2-h4 counter shouldn't encounter such problems.

The weapon we've considered in this chapter is both dangerous and good. Black should probably halt the h-pawn with ...h5, but then White gains a pleasant pull whether he deploys his dark-squared bishop to f4 or g5.

## Chapter Seven

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# Killing the Snake

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 Nf3 Bc7 7 g4! (Diagram 1)

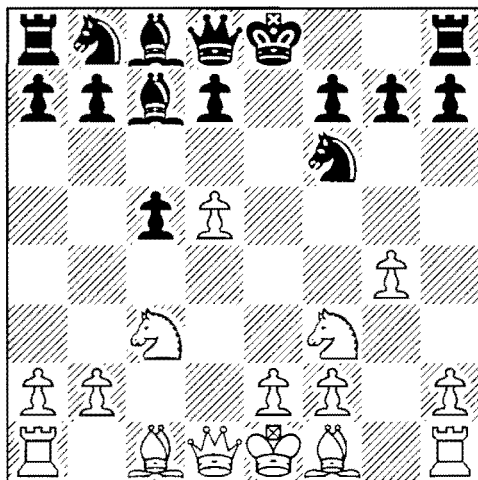


Diagram 1 (B)

The Snake Benoni is a fascinating creature: rather than potentially weaken his kingside with ...g6, Black keeps that square free for his queen's knight, preferring to bring the dark-squared bishop into play via d6, c7 and a5. Furthermore, the



Snake has done quite well in practice, as John Cox noted during research for his popular 2006 work *Starting Out: 1 d4*: ‘neither statistics (47% for Black) nor indeed theory say that Black is too terribly placed, so it’s surprising the opening doesn’t see a little more action.’ Cox went on to support my recommendation from *Play 1 #4*!, namely 6 Nf3 Bc7 7 Bg5 d6 8 e3 0-0 9 Nd2 h6 10 Bh4 Nbd7 11 Be2 a6 12 a4 Re8 13 0-0, but such a positional course of action isn’t going to suit everyone.

The Snake is not as rare as theory might give the impression – I’ve found over 1,100 games with it. Furthermore, no lesser players than Anand, Adams and Aro-nian have dabbled in it, with Grandmasters Miezis and Gashimov much more staunch exponents. Evidently it pays to be ready for the Snake, which one might think would be good *Dangerous Weapons* material for Black, except that White has a couple of rather aggressive and promising responses.

□ **J.Piket** ■ **M.Adams**

Groningen 1995

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6**

Not the only route into the Snake. Indeed, Piket-Adams actually began 1 d4 e6 2 c4 Nf6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 and only now 6 Nc3 Bc7.

**6 Nf3**

In the Looking a Little Deeper section, we will explore another aggressive idea for White, namely 6 e4 0-0 7 f4. That pretty much forces Black to sacrifice a piece with 7...Nxe4 8 Nxe4 Re8, but I don’t find his compensation too convincing after 9 Qe2!. Indeed, if this analysis holds up, 5...Bd6 might only be playable when White develops his king’s knight before his queen’s.

**6...Bc7**

Continuing along the traditional Snake path, but if Black wants to avoid our aggressive idea, he might prefer 6...0-0 which we will also examine below.

**7 g4!**

An early g2-g4 is all the rage these days in many openings, and makes a lot of sense here: Black is developing slowly and is likely to have to castle short. When this game was first published, it was widely heralded as a refutation of the Snake. Indeed, Adams even denoted his fifth move as being dubious in *Informant 65*. Quite why 7 g4 has been so rare this millennium is a mystery to me – the move still appears as dangerous as ever!

**7...d6**

We will have to return to this position to consider Miezis’ attempt to improve Black’s play with 7...Ba5. Nobody, though, has dared to touch 7...0-0?!, no doubt because 8 g5 Ne8 9 h4 (**Diagram 2**) leaves the knight stuck on e8 and White with a promising set-up: he may play for mate on the kingside or simply strangle the life

out of the black position after h5-h6.

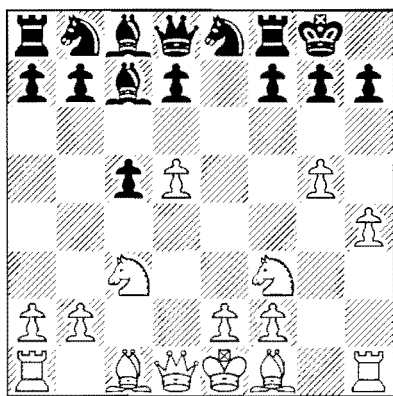


Diagram 2 (B)

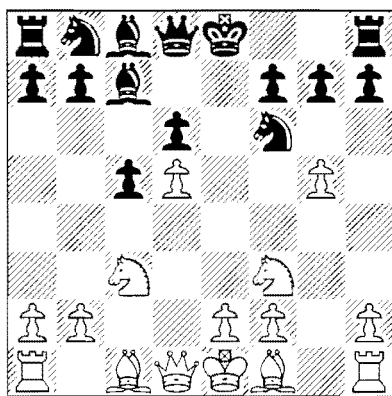


Diagram 3 (B)

### 8 g5 (Diagram 3) 8...Nfd7

As this blocks the queenside pieces, Black later attempted to improve at this point, but without much success:

a) 8...Nh5?! 9 e4 0-0 (neither does 9...g6 10 Be2 remotely appeal for Black: White might simply develop his queenside, although ideas of Nh4 are again very tempting) 10 Nh4! (an idea of Stohl's, improving over 10 Ne5!? g6 11 Nc4 Re8 12 Be3, which left White only a little better and in quite a messy position after 12...b5! 13 Nxb5 Rxe4 in R.Palliser-L.Aronian, Athens 2001, which was later drawn after a long, uncompromising struggle) 10...g6 11 Nf5 Bxf5 12 exf5 Re8+ 13 Be2 and it's hard not to agree with Stohl that White is clearly better here, as Black will suffer long-term problems on the kingside after f5-f6.

b) 8...Ng8 is another far from ideal square for the knight, and 9 h4 a6 10 h5!? Ne7 11 h6! g6 12 Bg2 Ba5 13 0-0 (**Diagram 4**) 13...Bxc3 (Black ideally might like to keep his bishop, but the knight was en route to e4) 14 bxc3 0-0 15 c4 Nd7 16 Bb2 f6 17 Qd2 left Black struggling somewhat in V.Kiselev-R.Ovetchkin, online blitz 2007.

### 9 h4 a6 10 a4

There's no need to allow Black to expand on the queenside, but White might also play à la Kiselev with 10 h5!?. After 10...b5 11 h6 g6 12 Bg2 0-0 13 a4! b4 14 Ne4 White retains the upper hand, especially with Black's dark-squared bishop rather shut in.

### 10...Qe7

The more recent game A.Goganov-V.Shapiro, St Petersburg 2005, deviated with 10...0-0 11 Bh3 (11 h5 Qe7 12 Rh4!? is a tempting alternative) 11...Re8 12 Qd3 Nf8

13 h5 Bxh3 14 Rxh3 Nbd7 15 Bf4 Qe7 and now playing à la Piket with 16 a5! looks like the best way of completely suffocating Black.

### 11 Bh3! (Diagram 5)

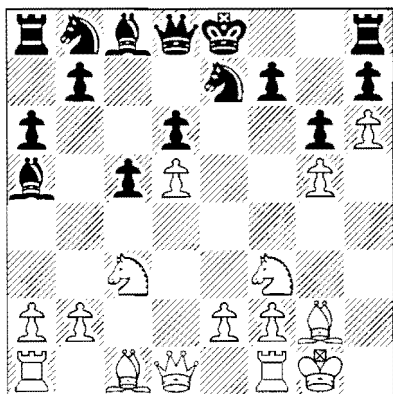


Diagram 4 (B)

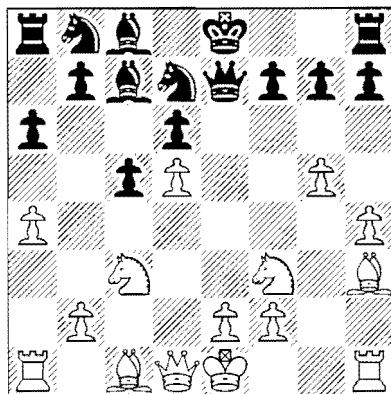
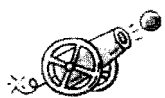


Diagram 5 (B)

This both forces Black to castle, in view of the tactic 11...Ne5? 12 Nxe5 Bxh3 13 Nxf7! Qxf7 14 Rxh3, and enables White to later exchange a piece which he might otherwise struggle to find a good role for.

### 11...0-0 12 Qd3

Also rather promising is Stohl's suggestion of 12 Bf4!?. The point is that after 12...Nb6?! (Stohl points out that 12...Ne5 13 Bxe5 dxe5 14 Bxc8 Rxc8 15 Ne4 is rather promising too for White; I wondered if Black might try 12...c4!?, but after 13 h5 Nc5 14 Bxc8 Rxc8 15 h6! Nd3+ 16 Kf1 Nxf4 17 Qd4 White regains the piece with interest) 13 Bxc8 Rxc8 14 h5 Black's knight has been decoyed away from the kingside and so White might even play directly for mate with g5-g6.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** That White enjoys such a promising choice on move 12 is testament to the strength of his powerful opening play! Adams is not only cramped on the queenside, but also lacks counterplay. No wonder that he never repeated the Snake after this game!

### 12...Ne5 13 Nxe5 Qxe5 14 a5! (Diagram 6)

Not so much clamping Black's b-pawn, as preventing the Snake bishop from completing its journey to a5.

### 14...Qd4?

Michael Adams is one of the toughest players around, but even he is unable to put up much resistance, having never fully recovered since being hit by 7 g4. The text merely makes matters worse, since Black's queen turns out to be misplaced rather than aggressively placed in mid-board, although the alternatives were hardly ideal either:

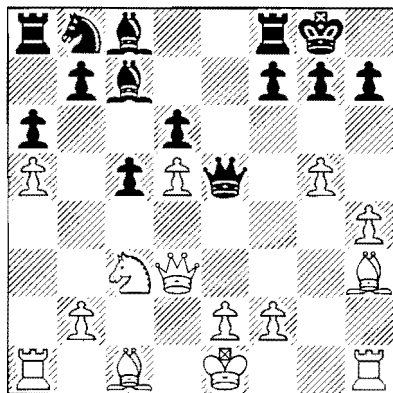


Diagram 6 (B)

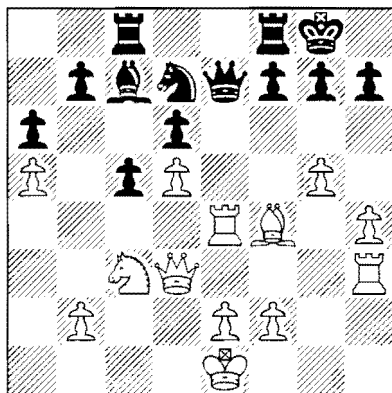


Diagram 7 (B)

a) 14...Bxh3 15 Rxh3 Nd7 16 Ra4! Rac8?! (the slightly desperate 16...f5 might be tried, although 17 Bf4 Qe7 18 h5 Ne5 19 Bxe5 Qxe5 20 h6 g6 21 Re3! Qh2 22 f4 Rae8 23 Re6 leaves Black's queen out on a limb and White somewhat better; probably the best defence is 16...Qe7!?, as pointed out by Raetsky and Chetverik, although I would still much prefer to take White after 17 Bf4 Ne5 18 Bxe5 Qxe5 19 Re3 Qh2 20 Qf5) 17 Bf4 Qe7 18 Re4 (**Diagram 7**) 18...Qd8 19 h5 (Adams) leaves White in complete control and Black will do well to survive on the kingside.

b) 14...b5 15 axb6 Bxb6 is an idea of Stohl's, but once again 16 Ra4 is a strong response, especially as 16...f5 17 gxf6 Qxf6 18 Rf4 Qe7 19 Rxf8+ Qxf8 20 Bxc8 Qxc8 21 Bf4 leaves Black completely ragged.

## 15 Qg3 Qb4 16 h5

White does gain a strong attack after this, albeit a less effective one than 16 Bxc8 Rxc8 17 Qh3! Rd8 18 h5 (Adams) would have given him. Indeed, Black is probably just lost here, as shown by the line 18...Bxa5 (or 18...Nd7 19 g6 Nf8 20 h6! and White decisively rips open the kingside) 19 g6 Re8 (White mates after 19...fxg6? 20 Qe6+ Kh8 21 hxg6 h6 22 Rxh6+!) 20 gxf7+ Kxf7 21 Rg1 Re7 22 Bh6! (**Diagram 8**), with a colossal attack based on the point that 22...gxh6? 23 Qf5+ Ke8 24 Rg8 is mate.

## 16...Nd7 17 g6 Nf6 18 gxh7+ Kh8!

When his chance, Adams defends as well as he can. Sheltering behind an enemy pawn is a common defensive motif in many Sicilian positions, and here Black had to avoid both 18...Nxh7? 19 Ra4 Qb3 20 Bh6 and 18...Kxh7? 19 Ra4 Qb3 20 Rg1 Rg8 21 Qg6+!! (Movsziszian), with the point that 21...fxg6 (or 21...Kh8 22 Qxf7 Bxh3 23 Qxh7 and the attack is overwhelming) 22 hxg6+ Kh8 23 Rh4+ mates down the h-file.

19 Rg1! (Diagram 9)

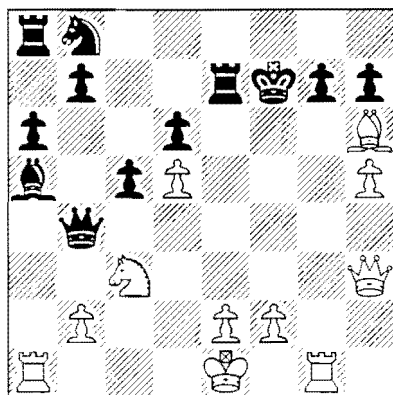


Diagram 8 (B)

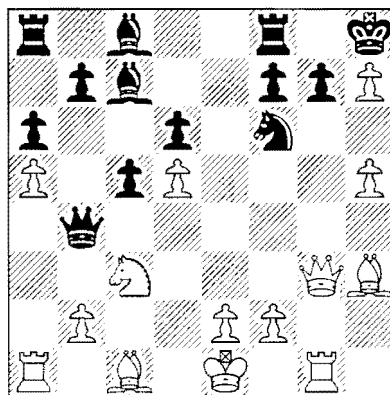


Diagram 9 (B)

Piket is still playing pretty well at this point, correctly sacrificing the h-pawn to further his attack, but time trouble was already not far away.

19...Nxh5 20 Qf3 Bxh3 21 Qxh5?!

White definitely misses a chance here with the intermezzo 21 Ra4!. Adams's notes reveal that he was intending to counter with 21...Bg4 (21...Qb3 22 Qxh5 Bd7 23 Qg5 forces mate with rather simple means) 22 Rxg4 Qb3, but after the neat switch-back 23 Qf5! g6 (or 23...Nf6 24 Bh6! Nxg4 25 Bxg7+ Kxg7 26 Rxg4+ followed by mate) 24 Qd3 there's no good defence to the threat to trap the black queen with 25 Ra3.

21...Bd7 22 Qg5?

A further error. Instead 22 Bh6 g6 23 Qf3 Bf5 24 Bxf8 Rxf8 25 0-0-0 Qh4 might have given Black some hopes of clinging on an exchange down, not that this should really be sufficient, but 22 Rxg7! (Diagram 10) was fairly obvious and very strong. Following 22...Kxg7? (probably Black has to try 22...Bd8 23 Rxf7 Bf6, not that there can be any doubting White's large advantage after 24 Rxf6!? Rxf6 25 Bg5, as given by Adams, or no less effectively 24 Bd2, with the idea of 24...Qxb2 25 Rc1 Bb5 26 Ne4) 23 Qh6+ Kh8 24 Bg5 f5 (the only try; 24...f6 goes down to 25 Bxf6+ Rxf6 26 Qxf6+ Kxh7 27 0-0-0 and 28 Rh1+) 25 Bf6+ Rxf6 26 Qxf6+ Kxh7 27 0-0-0 White en-

joys an enormous attack for the piece, which 27...Qf4+ 28 e3 Qh6 29 Qf7+ Kh8 30 Qxd7 Qh7 31 Qe6 (Stohl) regains while retaining a huge advantage.

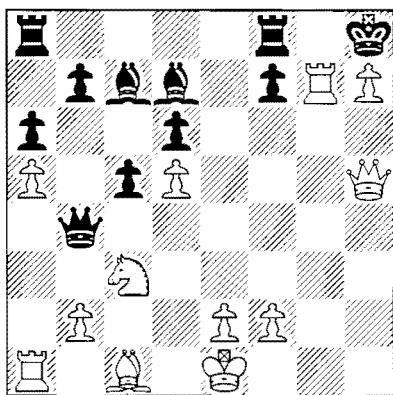


Diagram 10 (B)

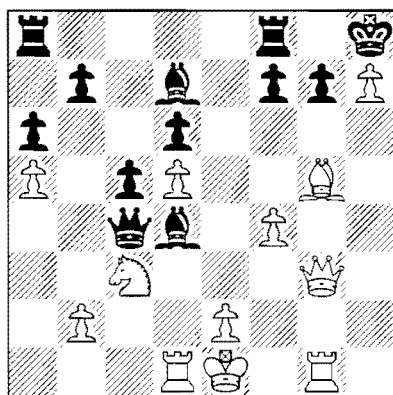


Diagram 11 (W)

## 22...Qd4

Bringing the queen back in touch with the defence and now Piket falters yet again.

## 23 Bf4?

After this Black's long-dormant dark-squared bishop resurfaces with some effect. White had to prefer the exchange of queens with 23 Be3 Qe5 24 Qxe5 dxe5 25 Bxc5 (Adams), when he would still have remained for preference.

## 23...Bd8! 24 Qg3 Bf6 25 Rd1 Qc4

Black would also have enjoyed reasonable counterchances after 25...Qb4!? and perhaps this was a little more precise.

## 26 Bg5 Be5! 27 f4! Bd4 (Diagram 11) 28 Rg2?

Short on time and no doubt unable to believe the scale of the transformation which had occurred, Piket fails to put up any resistance. Rather than collapse, he had to find 28 Rxd4! Qxd4 29 Be7 Rfe8 30 Bxd6 when all three results would have remained very possible.

## 28...Rae8

Now Black invades down the e-file and the end is nigh.

## 29 Rd3 Bf5 30 Rf3 Be4 31 Nxe4? Qc1 mate (0-1)

A disaster for our Dutch hero, especially considering the superb position he had built up after just 14 moves. If 7 g4 can work so well against a world-class grandmaster, just think how well it should fare against an ordinary, occasional Snake exponent!

## Looking A Little Deeper

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 (Diagram 12)

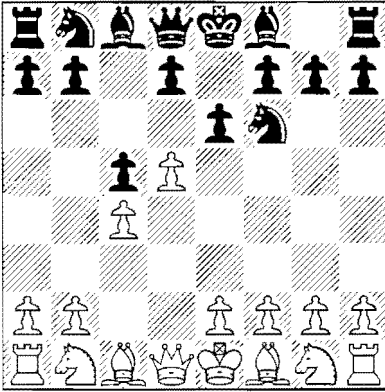


Diagram 12 (W)

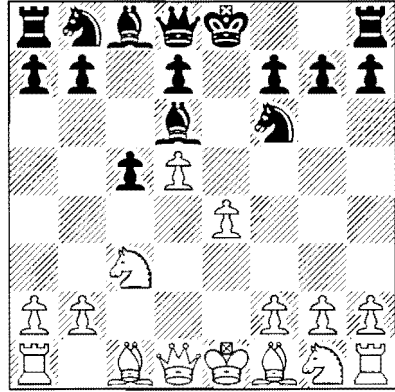


Diagram 13 (B)

We will now consider the Snake against the development of both knights:

A: 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6

B: 4 Nf3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6

It's worth noting that the relatively less provocative Line B is more likely to arise via the move order 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6.

**A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6?!**

The Snake is a provocative opening, but to employ it here is provocative in the extreme!

**6 e4 (Diagram 13) 6...0-0**

Essential. Black must avoid 6...Bc7? 7 d6! Ba5 8 e5 Ne4? (alternatively, 8...0-0 9 exf6 Qxf6 10 Nf3 Bxc3+ 11 bxc3 Qxc3+ 12 Bd2 Re8+ 13 Be2 simply left Black a piece down in A.Escobedo Tinajero-S.Morales Garcia, Merida 2006; the lesser evil is 8...Ng8, although this is still superb for White after 9 Bc4) 9 Qg4! **(Diagram 14)** when a miniature is very much on the cards. Black might already resign and finally did so after 9...Nxc3 (or 9...Bxc3+ 10 bxc3 Qa5 11 Ne2 and the knight is lost) 10 Qxg7 Ne4+ 11 Ke2 f5 (11...Rf8 12 Bh6 decides) 12 Qxh8+ Kf7 13 Qxh7+ Ke6 in S.Van Gisbergen-S.Lupu, Cappelle la Grande 1994.

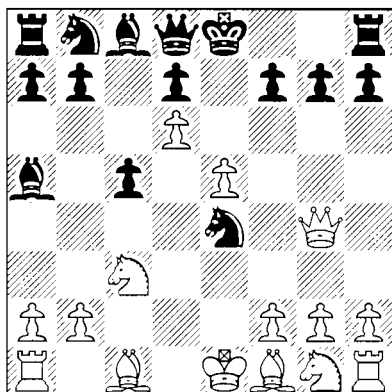


Diagram 14 (B)

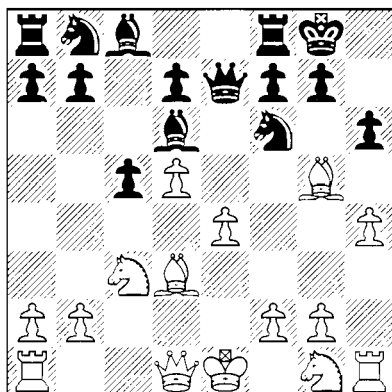
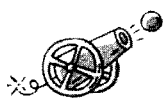


Diagram 15 (B)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Rather surprisingly White has more often failed to punish 6...Bc7? than actually done so. Advancing the d-pawn is double-edged in certain Snake positions, but not this one. Make sure that you remember 7 d6!

A somewhat better alternative is 6...Qe7!?, with which the Latvian GM Miezis, a man who has played more than 80 (!) games with the Snake, dabbled in 2005. He has, though, subsequently returned to 6...0-0, which is a surprise since it seems that 6...Qe7 7 Bd3 only leaves White a little better:

- a) 7...Bc7 8 Nge2!? (White borrows an aggressive set-up from the Modern Benoni) 8...a6 9 a4 0-0 10 0-0 d6 11 Ng3 gave White an edge in E.Merzliakov-V.Shapiro, St Petersburg 2006.
- b) 7...c4 (more ambitious, and possibly too much so) 8 Bxc4! Nxe4 9 Nxe4 Qxe4+ 10 Qe2 Qxe2+ 11 Nxe2 a6 12 a4 Bc5 13 0-0 saw the exchange of queens leave White with a pleasant edge in K.Hovmoller-N.Miezis, Dianalund 2005: Ng3-e4 will follow.
- c) 7...0-0 8 Nf3 Bc7 9 0-0 d6 10 Bg5 is a simple approach, with an edge for White.



**ROLL THE DICE!** Those with more caveman-like instincts might prefer to launch an attack with 8 Bg5 h6 9 h4!? (Diagram 15). The bishop is currently taboo, but White will be happy to keep offering it in a bid to rip open kingside lines.



1 Zacharek-N.Miezis, Cork 2005, continued 9...Re8 10 Nh3 Be5 (10...hxg5 11 hxg5 12 f4 gives White pretty dangerous compensation) 11 f4 Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 d6 13 c2 Nbd7 14 Qf3 when White was aggressively poised, but the position objectively rather unclear.

7 f4! (Diagram 16)

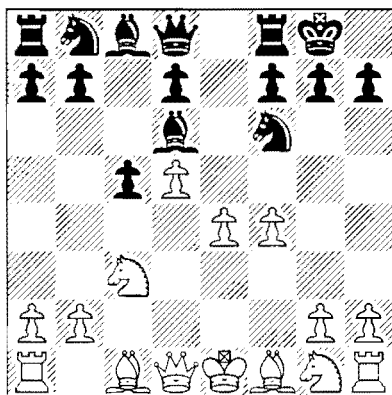


Diagram 16 (B)

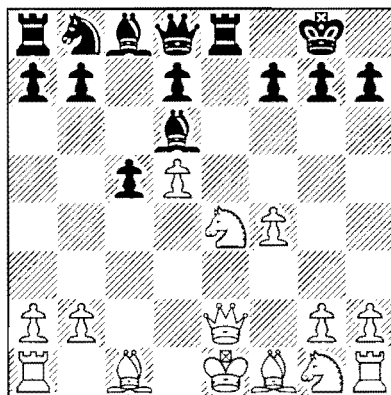


Diagram 17 (B)

Just as in the Modern Benoni, the advance of the white central pawns must be critical. Remarkably White has scored just 39% from this position, and that low score isn't only caused by a few games in which he erroneously returned the piece by avoiding 7...Nxe4 8 Nxe4 Re8 9 Qe2. Admittedly White faces a few practical difficulties after the forthcoming piece sacrifice, but I find it very hard to believe that he isn't already at least clearly better. That was also Raetsky and Chetverik's view in their 2005 *Starting Out: Benoni Systems*, although older theory was less impressed on the few occasions that it mentioned 7 f4: Psakhis's *The Complete Benoni* giving the move a dubious symbol back in the less materialistic days of 1995.

### 7...Nxe4!?

Black's main choice and, indeed, his only real option. The alternatives are pretty horrendous for him:

a) 7...Re8? 8 e5 Bxe5 (White also wins a piece after 8...Bc7 9 Kf2! because the f6-knight lacks a flight square) 9 fxe5 Rxe5+ 10 Be2 d6 11 Nf3 Re8 12 0-0 left White a clear piece ahead in M.Van Ginkel-R.Van Aurich, Rosmalen 1993.

b) 7...Bc7 8 e5 Ne8 9 d6 Ba5 10 Nf3 leaves Black horribly cramped and 10...Nc6 11 Bd3 g6 12 0-0 Bxc3 13 bxc3 Ng7 14 f5! heralded a rather strong attack in M.Riediger-N.Rogobete, Bayern 2002.

### 8 Nxe4 Re8 9 Qe2! (Diagram 17)

The only way to remain material ahead because 9...f5 can now be met by 10 Nxd6 Rxe2+ 11 Bxe2, when White's rook and two pieces ought to count for somewhat more than Black's extra queen, as indeed they did in the recent game M.Gagunashvili-J.Sutherland, Sydney 2008.

## 9...Bf8

Threatening ...f5 once again, but Black also has:

a) 9...Bc7 10 g4! (this might appear loosening, but does crucially prevent the threat) 10...d6 11 f5! threatens to unravel with Bg2, Nh3-f2, etc. Thus Black pretty much has to try 11...Bxf5!?, not that the tactics favour him after 12 Bg5: for example, 12...Bxg4?! 13 Qxg4 Qd7 14 Qf3 f5 15 Bh3 Rxe4+ 16 Qxe4 fxe4 17 Bxd7 Nxd7 18 Nh3 and White emerges a rook ahead, or 12...Ba5+ 13 Kd1 Qd7 (a relatively better try) 14 gxf5 Qa4+ 15 Qc2 Qd4+ 16 Qd3 Rxe4 17 Qxd4 Rxd4+ 18 Kc2 Nd7 19 Rd1 and White went on to convert his piece for two pawn advantage in N.Kalesis-S.Argyroudis, Greek Team Championship 2003.

b) 9...b5 10 Nxd6 (not the only approach; a case could also be made for 10 Kf2!?, followed by either 11 Qc2 or 10...Na6 11 Bd2 c4 12 Re1) 10...Rxe2+ 11 Bxe2 Ba6 12 a4 b4 13 Nb5? Bb7! prepared to trap the errant white knight in G.Haemmerle-H.Hamberger, Austrian League 2007, but 13 Kf2 improves, after which White maintains both control and the advantage following, say, 13...Qf6 14 Nb5 Qh4+ 15 g3 Qd8 16 d6 Nc6 17 Nf3 Qf6 18 Rd1.

c) 9...Na6 remains untried, but was mentioned by Raetsky and Chetverik. That said, their further 10 Nf3 f5 11 Nxd6 Rxe2+ 12 Bxe2 Nb4 13 Kf2 (**Diagram 18**) looks promising for White, such as after 13...Qf6 14 Nc4! b5 (14...Nxd5?! 15 Rd1 Nb4 16 Nd6 obstructs Black's development) 15 Ne3 c4 16 Bd2 Nd3+ 17 Bxd3 cxd3 18 Bc3.

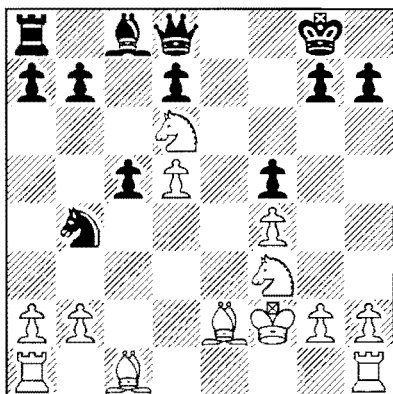


Diagram 18 (B)

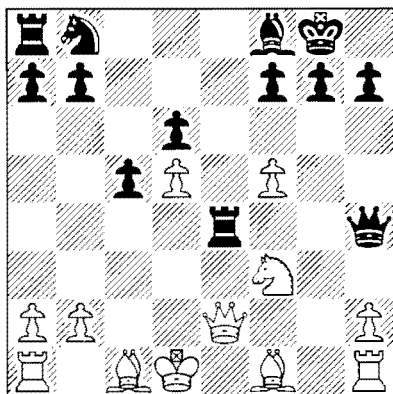


Diagram 19 (B)

10 g4

White must continue thus if he wishes to maintain his material advantage.

### 10...b6

This has been Black's most common try and was employed by the highest-rated player to have reached this position, the Ukrainian GM Efimenko. However, again there are alternatives:

a) 10...d6 was seen in the stem game, M.Hebden-J.Hector, Issy les Moulineaux 1987. That continued 11 f5! (a decent case can also be made for 11 Nh3!?, after which Black's compensation is not wholly convincing after either 11...f5 12 gxf5 Bxf5 13 Nh2 Qe7 14 Bg2 Nd7 15 0-0 or 11...Bxg4 12 Qxg4 Rxe4+ 13 Be2 Nd7 14 -0) 11...Bxf5 12 gxf5 Qh4+ 13 Kd1 Rxe4 with 'a dangerous attack' according to Sakhis. However, after 14 Nf3 (**Diagram 19**) I don't see any such attack. Hebden retained a comfortable advantage with 14...Qg4 (the queens don't have to come off, but 14...Qe7 15 Qc2, followed by Bd3, is also promising for White) 15 Bh3! Rxe2 16 Bxg4 Re4 and now 17 Bh3!?, intending to re-route to d3 via f1 to maintain control, is a decent alternative to the game's 17 Bh5 g6 18 fxxg6 hxxg6 19 Nd2 Rd4 20 Be2 Nd7 21 Kc2, with a clear advantage in both cases.

b) 10...f5?! rather smacks of desperation and 11 gxf5 d6 12 Bh3 Nc6 13 Nf3 (probably even stronger is 13 dxc6 d5 14 c7! when the c-pawn is taboo due to the check on f6, and both 14...Qh4+ 15 Kf1 Rxe4 16 Qd3 Rd4 17 Qf3 and 14...Qd7!? 15 Be3 Rxe4 16 Bg2 Re8 17 Nf3, followed by 18 Ne5, leave White somewhat better) 13...Nd4 14 Nxd4 Qh4+ (**Diagram 20**) most certainly didn't force White to give up his queen with the surprising 15 Nf2?! in T.Hillarp Persson-O.Almeida Quintana, Banyoles 2006. Instead the materialistic 15 Kd1! would have left Black struggling: check on f6 is again threatened and 15...Qxh3 16 Ng5 Rxe2 17 Nxh3 forces the queens off, thereby preserving White's piece advantage.

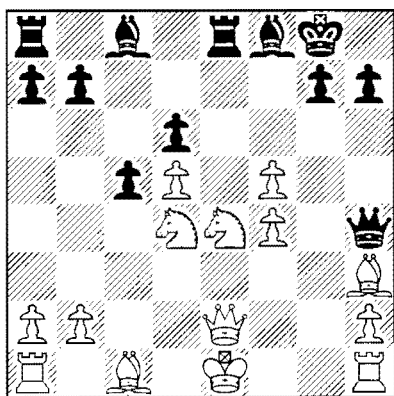


Diagram 20 (W)

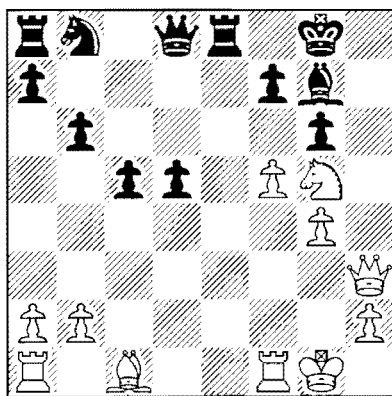


Diagram 21 (B)

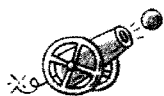
c) 10...Na6!?! is a reasonable try, not that 11 Nf3 (there's also a good argument for

11 Bd2!?, preventing ...Nb4 and preparing to castle, but the 11 Bg2?! Nb4 12 Nf3 of J.Stopa-D.Kuljasevic, Richardson 2007, should probably be avoided since 12...b6! would have given Black reasonable counterplay) 11...Nb4 12 Kf2 gives Black enough for his piece, such as after 12...b6 13 Bd2 Ba6 (or 13...Nxd5 14 Re1 Bb7 15 Qd3 and 16 Bg2) 14 Qe3 Bxf1 15 Raxf1 Nxd5 16 Qd3 Nf6 17 Nxf6+ Qxf6 18 b3 and White is consolidating.

It may be worth knowing that Hebden won his game, whereas both Hillarp Persson and Stopa were only able to draw. However, that contrasts well with White's 0/3 so far against 10...b6: a score which can but improve, at least so long as people keep playing 5...Bd6!

## 11 Bg2

Keeping e4 well defended, although White may now struggle to castle short. Instead 11 Nf3? Ba6 12 Qc2 Qe7 embarrasses White down the e-file, but a case can certainly be made for 11 Nh3!?. The main point is that 11...Bb7 (11...Ba6 can now be met by 12 Qf3 Qe7 13 Nhf2, keeping everything under control) 12 Bg2 Bxd5 13 0-0 looks promising. Black's main try and one which does regain the piece is 13...Bxe4 14 Bxe4 d5, but after 15 Bxh7+! Kxh7 16 Qd3+ Kg8 17 Ng5 g6 18 Qh3 Bg7 19 f5 (Diagram 21) White is happy to return the piece for a crushing attack.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Black might have done well so far in practice with 10...b6, but nobody has yet tried 11 Nh3!?. This logical idea appears to either consolidate the extra piece or trap Black in a vicious attack.

## 11...Ba6 (Diagram 22)

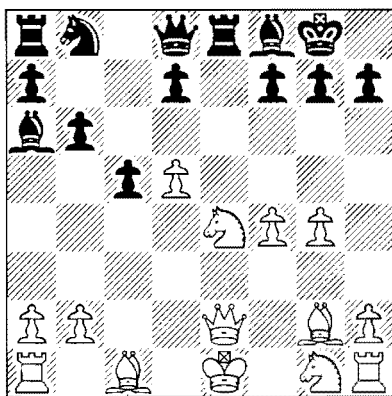


Diagram 22 (W)

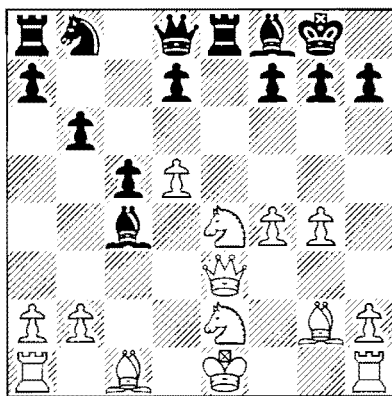


Diagram 23 (B)

We now come to a parting of the ways:

6 12 Qf3 Bc4 13 Ne2 Bxd5 14 Nf6+?! Qxf6 15 Qxd5 Nc6 16 Kf1 c4! gave Black some play for the piece in Y.Kuzubov-Z.Efimenko, Kramatorsk 2002, not least because of White's co-ordination difficulties. However, 14 Qd3! is a clear improvement and after 14...Qh4+ (or 14...Bc6 15 Ng5, trading pieces and enabling White to castle) 15 N2g3 Bb7 16 0-0! Ba6 17 Qd5 Bxf1 18 Kxf1 Nc6 19 Nf5 Black might have regained an exchange, but that has cost him the initiative, leaving White's queen and extra minor pieces dominating the board.

7 I also quite like 12 Qe3!? Bc4 and now not the 13 Bd2 of R.Meessen-K.Wornath, German League 2001, but rather 13 Ne2 (**Diagram 23**), which requires a little calculation, but appears promising: 13...Bxd5 (or 13...Na6 14 Qc3 Bxd5 15 Nf6+ Qxf6 16 Bxd5 Qe7 17 Bf3 Qh4+ 18 Kf1 d5 19 Kg2 and Black's central pawn mass might look impressive, but White is set to complete development with Bd2 and Rhe1, and looks to be doing quite well) 14 N2c3 Bb7 15 0-0 d5 16 Rd1 d4 17 Qd3 and White retains his extra piece, while creating threats with his e4-knight.

Quite why 6 e4 0-0 7 f4 isn't more popular is a mystery, as is just what Miezis and Kashimov have in store for it. Perhaps that's testament to the surprise value of the Snake, which has been rarely covered by theory. Between Psakhis (who allocated 3 pages to it) and Raetsky and Chetverik (9 pages), I can't think of a major work which gave the opening decent coverage. Likewise, whereas in the mid-nineties there were a few theoretical surveys on the Snake (in both *New in Chess Yearbook* and *ChessBase Magazine*), nowadays there are none, with the exception of when the Snake is employed against a 3 g3 move order (which may well be playable for Black).

## **B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nf3 exd5 5 cxd5 Bd6 6 Nc3 Bc7**

In recent years, Black has sometimes preferred to sidestep our main line with 5...0-0 (**Diagram 24**), delaying the Snake bishop's redeployment. One decent response for White is to head for a set-up along the lines of the Modern Main Line of the Modern Benoni with 7 e4 (7 g4 remains untested here, probably because 7...Nxg4 8 Rg1 Nxh2 is good for Black; however, White might consider 8 Ne4!?) 7...Re8 (it's too early to retreat the bishop as 7...Bc7?! 8 d6! Ba5 9 e5!? – ambitious and fairly critical, although the simpler 9 Bd3 is also promising: for example, 9...c4 10 Bxc4 Nxe4 11 0-0 Nxc3 12 bxc3 Bxc3 13 Bg5 with once again more than enough for the pawn – 9...Re8 10 Be2 Ng4 11 Bg5 gives White the initiative, as demonstrated by one of your authors: G.Jones-F.Sanz Alonso, La Laguna 2007, continued 11...Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 Qa5 13 0-0 Nc6 14 Re1 b5 15 Bf4 Bb7 16 Bd3, threatening 17 Bf5 and leaving White clearly on top) 8 Bd3 Bc7 (the typical Benoni idea 8...c4 doesn't fully convince with the bishop on d6: 9 Bxc4! Nxe4 10 0-0 Nxc3 11 bxc3 gives White a useful lead in development, and 11...Qc7 12 Qd3! began to eye the undefended black kingside in M.Bobula-I.Shrentzel, Warsaw (rapid) 2007) 9 0-0 d6

(Diagram 25) and now:

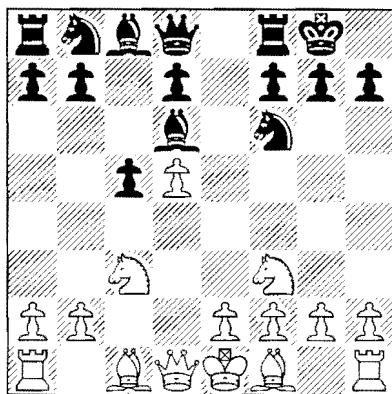


Diagram 24 (W)

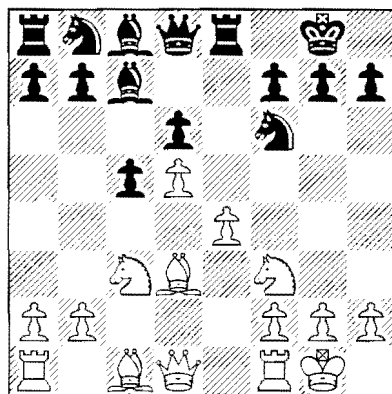


Diagram 25 (W)

a) 10 h3 (usual; White continues his MML-like play) 10...Nbd7 (similar but untried is 10...a6 11 a3!? b5 12 b4, aiming to keep Black under control on the queenside; those seeking a more direct approach may, though, prefer 11 a4 Nbd7 12 Qe2!? which is also rare, but has the idea of going forward with 12...Nf8 13 Nd2 Bd7 14 f4, as occurred in C.Hogea-H.Varlan, Romanian Team Championship 1994) 11 a3!? (this plan, fighting for control of the queenside, appears no less promising than the standard 11 Re1 a6 12 a4; a related idea is 11 Bf4 a6 12 a3 and after 12...Nf8 13 b4 Ng6 14 Bh2 cxb4 15 axb4 Bd7 16 Re1 Rc8 17 Rc1 Bb8 18 Qb3! White's queenside play gave him an edge in R.Janssen-N.Miezis, Haarlem 2004) 11...Ba5 12 Re1 a6 13 Rb1! (**Diagram 26**) 13...c4! (Black counters forcefully, whereas 13...b5 14 b4 would both hold him up on the queenside and prepare to meet 14...Bb6 15 Bf4 Nf8?! with 16 e5!) 14 Bxc4 Bxc3 15 bxc3 Nxe4 16 Qd4 Ndc5 17 Rb2 was unclear in E.Relange-C.Bauer, Montpellier 1999.

b) White should also give attention to the idea of delaying h2-h3. In H.Schroeder-G.Kneipp, correspondence 1988, 10 Qc2!? was tried and 10...Bg4 (this rather plays into White's hands; 10...Nbd7 is probably a better try and after 11 h3 – 11 Nb5 Bb8 12 a4 a6 13 Na3 b5! should be okay for Black – 11...a6 we've transposed to no lesser game than V.Ivanchuk-V.Gashimov, French League 2007, which continued 12 b3!? Nf8 13 Ne2 b5 14 Ng3 Bd7 15 a4 with perhaps a small edge) 11 Nd2! Nbd7 12 f3 Bh5 13 Nb5 Bb8 14 a4 a6 15 Na3! gave White an edge, due in no small part to Black's offside light-squared bishop.

Returning to 6...Bc7:

**7 g4! (Diagram 27) 7...Ba5!?**

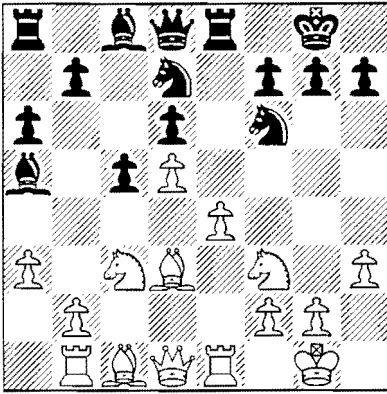


Diagram 26 (B)

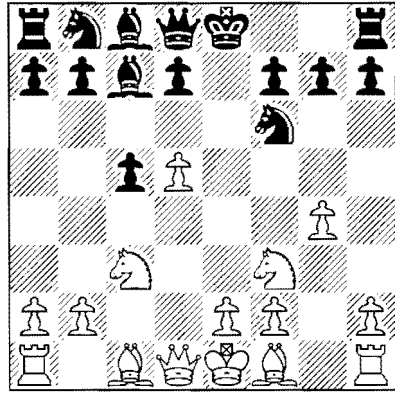


Diagram 27 (B)

Mieziš' idea. As we saw in Piket-Adams, Black should avoid 7...0-0 and 7...d6 should also probably be denoted as dubious, despite being the most common choice in practice. That leaves:

a) 7...Qe7 is the only other move tried so far. H.Kober-A.Illner, German League 1999, continued 8 g5 (an idea of Adams also deserves attention, namely 8 d6!? Qxd6 – 8...Bxd6? 9 g5 Nh5 10 Nb5 Be5 11 Nxe5 Qxe5 is fantastic for White, especially so after the neat point 12 f4! Nxf4 13 Qd6 – 9 Qxd6 Bxd6 10 g5 Nh5 11 Nb5, forcing 11...Ke7 and leaving White with clear compensation for his pawn after 12 e4) 8...Ne4 9 Qa4! f5 (or 9...Nxc3 10 bxc3 0-0 11 h4!? d6 12 Qf4 which is a little crude but by no means ineffective) 10 gxf6 Nxf6 11 Rg1 Na6 12 a3 0-0 13 Qh4 Kh8 14 Bh3 (**Diagram 28**) and with Black once again both a little cramped and under some kingside pressure, White was for preference.

b) It's also worth making sure that 7...Nxg4? is inadvisable and, indeed, 8 d6 Ba5 9 Rg1 Nf6 (9...h5 10 h3 Nh6 may improve, not that there can be any doubting White's advantage after either 11 Bg5!? or Stohl's 11 Rgx7 Nf5 12 Rg5) 10 Rgx7 Nc6 11 Qd3 leaves Black struggling badly.

c) 7...h6 is a suggestion of Stohl's which remains untouched, quite possibly because 8 d6 Ba5 9 Qd3 takes control of some key squares and prepares to create an awkward pin after 10 g5 hxg5 11 Bxg5. White might also consider the more direct 8 g5!? hxg5 9 d6 Ba5 10 Bxg5 when 10...Qb6! 11 Rb1! (11 Bxf6 Qxb2 12 Bxg7 Bxc3+ 13 Bxc3 Qxc3+ 14 Nd2 Qe5 is much less clear) 11...Ne4 12 Qd3 f5 (12...Nxd6 13 Nd2 breaks the pin and gives White dangerous play for his pawn) 13 Bd2 Qxd6 14 Nxe4 Qxd3 15 exd3 fxe4 16 dxe4 Bxd2+ 17 Kxd2 should be better for White who will develop freely with Bc4 and Rhg1.

8 Qd3 (**Diagram 29**)

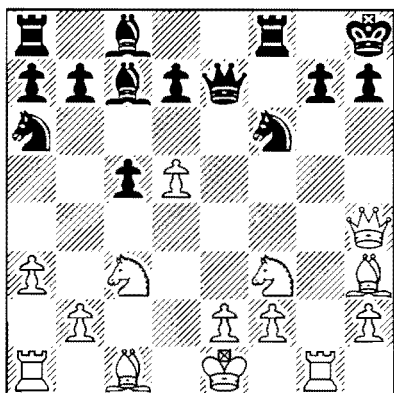


Diagram 28 (B)

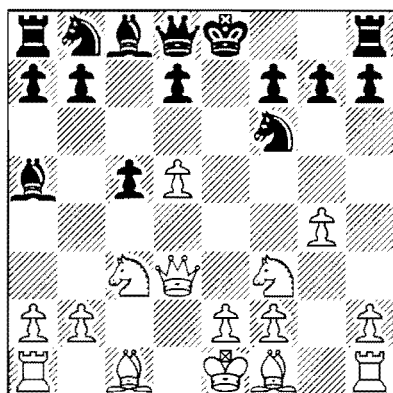


Diagram 29 (B)

Following Black's active last, White must take steps against the threat of 8...Ne4. Having to actively develop the queen is hardly a problem, though, and it remains a mystery quite why 7...Ba5, if that is the reason, killed off interest in 7 g4 so quickly in the late nineties. Back then Piket-Adams was considered something of a refutation of the Snake, and certainly Burgess and Pedersen rushed to recommend the move in their excellent 1997 repertoire work, *Beating the Indian Defences*.

### 8...Qe7

Now matters can become quite forcing, so Miezis later tried 8...Na6!? in T.Johansen-N.Miezis, Oslo 2006. Play continued in quite an uncompromising vein with 9 a3 d6 10 g5 Ng8 and now as well as the game's 11 Bf4 Ne7 12 0-0-0, White should consider 11 b4!? Bb6 (11...cxb4? 12 axb4 Nxb4 13 Qb5+ Bd7 14 Qxa5 Nc2+ 15 Kd1 Nxa1 16 Qxa1 gives White two minor pieces for a rook and a pawn; admittedly White's king is misplaced, but with Ne4 imminent and Black vulnerable down the long a1-h8 diagonal, White is doing rather well) 12 Bf4, creatively playing on both flanks and intending to follow up by attacking d6 with 13 Nb5 or 13 Ne4.

### 9 Bd2 0-0

Prudent, whereas 9...Nxg4?! 10 Rg1 Ne5 11 Nxe5 Qxe5 looks rather risky for Black especially after 12 Rg5!? (Raetsky and Chetverik point out that the simpler 12 Qe3 Qxe3 13 Bxe3 regains the pawn with advantage) 12...Qf6 13 Qe3+ Kd8 14 0-0-0 with some initiative for the pawn.

### 10 d6! (Diagram 30)

Seizing further space as White once again hinders Black's development. The earlier game A.Blees-N.Miezis, Antwerp 1996, had seen 10 g5 Bxc3! 11 Bxc3 Ne4 12



Be5 Nxg5 13 Nxg5 Qxg5 when, rather than regain the pawn with 14 Bd6, Stohl's suggestion of 14 Qg3!? Qxg3 15 hxg3 looks like the best try, retaining sufficient compensation due to White's dark-square control and kingside potential.

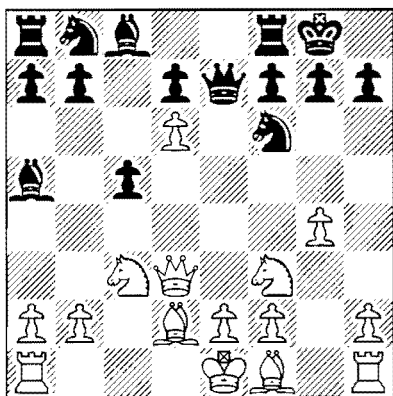


Diagram 30 (B)

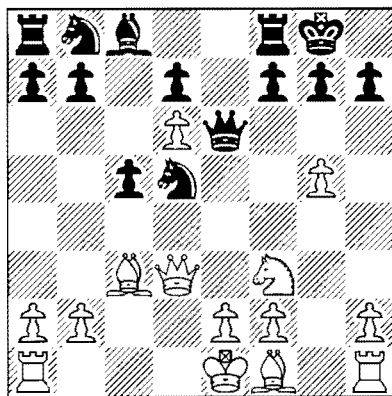


Diagram 31 (W)

### 10...Qe6 11 g5 Bxc3

Just as in Bleeis-Miezis, Black is advised to exchange. Otherwise 11...Ne8?! 12 Nd5!? (another idea of Stohl's, but White doesn't have to sacrifice and 12 Bf4 b6 13 f4 should slightly favour him due to the cramping influence exerted by the d6-pawn) 12...Bxd2+ 13 Nxd2 looks like quite a promising pawn sacrifice: for example, 13...Qxd6 (or 13...Nc6 14 0-0-0 Qxd6 15 Ne4 Qe5 16 f4 when Black is cramped and struggling) 14 Ne4 Qe6 (now White regains his pawn, but 14...Qe5 runs into 15 f4!, with the point that 15...Qxb2 16 Rb1 Qxa2 17 Ne7+ Kh8 18 Nxc8 picks up a piece) 15 Nxc5 Qe5 16 Ne4 and White's knights dominate the board.

### 12 Bxc3 Nd5 (Diagram 31)

Miezis' preference, not that 12...Ne4!? 13 Be5 Qf5 (but not 13...f5? 14 gxf6 Nxf6 15 Rg1 with good attacking chances for White) is so bad for Black. Following 14 h4! Nc6 15 Bc3 Re8 16 Bh3 the position is quite complex, but White's freer development makes him slightly for choice.

After 12...Nd5, it is hard to believe that White isn't better: he is slightly ahead in development and has decent attacking prospects on the kingside. He should, though, avoid 13 Bh3?! Nf4! and practice has instead seen:

a) 13 Bd2 preserves the bishop-pair and leaves the d-pawn taboo (13...Qxd6? 14 e4). A.Dgebuadze-N.Miezis, Linares 1997, continued 13...Nc6 14 a3 Re8 15 0-0-0 Nb6!? (Miezis has a creative idea in mind; it doesn't appear sufficient for equality, but Black is struggling in any case with h4-h5 imminent) 16 h4 a5 (**Diagram 32**)

and now White should take time out for 17 Bf4! (Dgebuadze raced on with 17 h5, but 17...Nb4! 18 axb4 axb4 gave Black a strong attack and, indeed, White was wise to allow perpetual with 19 Bh3 Ra1+ 20 Kc2 b3+ 21 Qxb3 Qe4+ 22 Qd3 Qa4+), which appears to maintain the upper hand:

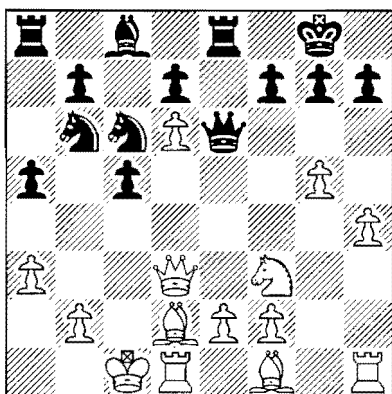


Diagram 32 (W)

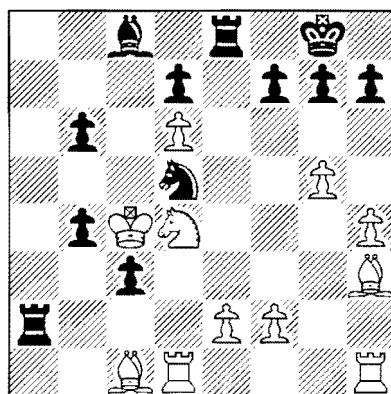


Diagram 33 (B)

a1) 17...Nb4? now fails to 18 axb4 axb4 19 e3 and Black's attack is insufficient as White's king can come to d2.

a2) 17...c4 18 Qc2 Nb4!? 19 axb4 axb4 is a better version of the sacrifice, although it seems that 20 Qb1 c3 21 b3 keeps everything defended: for example, 21...Ra3 22 Bh3! (22 Nd4?! Qd5 23 e4 Qa5 is much less clear) 22...Qxb3 23 Qxb3 Rxb3 24 Nd4 Ra3 25 Kc2 Ra2+ 26 Kd3 Nd5 27 Bc1 b6 28 Kc4! (**Diagram 33**) and after a slightly hairy sequence, White succeeds in successfully blockading Black's queenside pawns, leaving him with some advantage.

a3) 17...a4 18 h5 Na5 (slow, but what else is there?) 19 e3 c4 20 Qc2 Nb3+ 21 Kb1 Ra5 22 Nd4 Qd5 23 Rg1 and White's attack is very strong, unless Black accepts a clear disadvantage by exchanging queens.

b) 13 h4!? may be even more promising: 13...b6?! (slow; instead 13...Nxc3 14 Qxc3 Qxd6 15 h5 threatens 16 h6 and gives White a strong initiative for the pawn, and one which persists in the event of 15...Qb6 16 h6 Qb4 17 Qxb4 cxb4 18 hxg7 Kxg7 19 Rd1, but perhaps Black has to try this) 14 g6! fxg6 (White's attack is too fast after 14...hxg6? 15 Ng5 Nf4 16 Qg3 Qxd6 17 h5 Bb7 18 e4) 15 Ng5 (**Diagram 34**) 15...Qf5? (this just seems to lose; perhaps Black must grovel with 15...Nf4 16 Nxe6 Nxd3+ 17 exd3 Bb7 18 Nxf8 Bxh1 19 Nxg6 hxg6 20 Kd2 when White is only clearly better with 21 Bh3 next up) 16 Qxf5 gxf5 17 Bg2 Bb7 18 Rg1! (very deep and strong, whereas 18 0-0-0 Nxc3 19 Bxb7 Nxd1 20 Bxa8 Nxf2 21 Rf1 Ng4 22 Bd5+ Kh8 23 Nf7+ Rxf7 24 Bxf7 g6 might be tenable for Black) 18...Re8 (neither 18...g6 19

h5 nor 18...Na6 19 Ne6 get Black out of gaol) 19 Bxd5+! Bxd5 20 0-0-0 Bc4 20...Bxa2 loses in the same way after 21 Nxb7! Kxb7 22 Rxb7+ Kh6 23 Rdg1) 21 Nxb7! (olé!) 21...Kxb7 22 Rxb7+ (**Diagram 35**) 22...Kh6 23 Rdg1 (the attack is overwhelming) 23...f4 24 R1g6+ Kh5 25 Rg2! Kh6 26 R7g6+ Kh7 27 R6g5! Bxe2 28 Rf5 Kh6 29 Rf6+ Kh5 30 Rxf4 Nc6 31 Rg5+ Kh6 32 Rf6+ Kh7 33 Rf7+ Kh6 34 Bd2 and Black resigned was the brutal and clinical course of M.Gleichmann-R.Hempel, correspondence 2002.

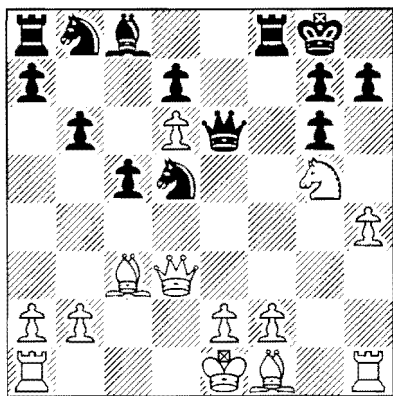


Diagram 34 (B)

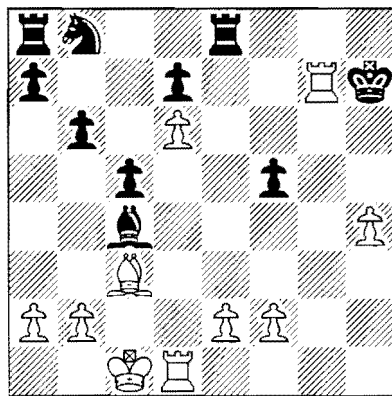


Diagram 35 (B)

Contrary to a few rumours in the late nineties, Miezi's 7...Ba5, while quite possibly Black's best try, does not fully neutralize 7 g4. Dgebuadze's initial play was pretty aggressive and forceful, after which it looks like Gleichmann's even more incisive idea just leaves Black in huge trouble.

## Conclusion

Against an early Nc3, the Snake Benoni appears unplayable: 5...Bd6 6 e4 0-0 7 f4 is simply too strong. White must be prepared to patiently follow up 7...Nxe4 8 Nxe4 Re8 9 Qe2, but if he does, he should be able to put his extra piece to good use.

Aggressive souls should also be happy to see the Snake: 5...Bd6 6 Nf3/Nc3 Bc7 7 g4 continues to create serious problems, while giving White all the fun. Don't forget too that 7 g4 has been surprisingly unpopular of late, and so may surprise even fairly regular Snake exponents. Quite possibly Black should sidestep with 6...0-0 when I'm afraid that there's nothing particularly aggressive available: White should settle for a small edge with an MML-type approach.

## Chapter Eight

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# The Super Extended Fianchetto

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 g3 0-0 7 h4! (Diagram 1)

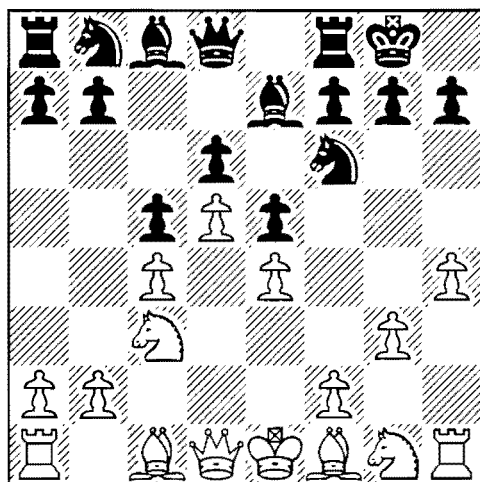


Diagram 1 (B)

In the Czech Benoni, a popular regrouping involves the withdrawal of the f6-knight to e8 from where the steed might transfer to c7, supporting the ...b5 break, or be 'fianchettoed' on g7 to assist the ...f5 push. Either way this retreat facilitates

the exchange of Black's bad bishop with ...Bg5. White has several systems available to combat the Czech Benoni, but I have always been attracted to an idea which prevents Black from freeing his position with an early ...Bg5.

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■ C.Ward ■ R.Farleigh

isle of Man 1996

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 g3**

White's obvious two pawn breaks are b2-b4 and f2-f4. If he wants to play for the latter then he is best off including this g-pawn advance, as it would be a mistake to concede control of the e5-square after an exchange on f4.

**6...0-0**

Black could delay this and try, say, 6...a6, but after 7 a4 things are likely to transpose either to this game or to a variation considered in the Looking a Little Deeper section, below.

**7 h4!**

Somewhere I can recall this relatively offbeat move being annotated with a '?!', but as over the years I have scored 100% with it, I find that assessment completely unjustified! In order to understand this advance you first have to appreciate that with the centre closed White need not be in a hurry to castle. Indeed, as you will soon see, he may choose never to do so. Bearing that in mind, 7 h4 fulfils three useful functions:

- i. It makes the bad-for-good-bishop trade with Bh3 a bit more viable as a knight (or even a rook) now won't be so vulnerable on h3.
- ii. It controls the g5-square, thereby completely preventing any ...Bg5 ideas that Black may have had up his sleeve.
- iii. Although this pawn is unlikely to checkmate the black king on its own, it does have some aggressive intent. Furthermore, Black may be dissuaded from arranging the ...f5 break with ...Ne8 and ...g6, as then h4-h5 may lead to the h-file being opened.

**7...Nbd7 (Diagram 2)**

Later we will investigate Black's alternatives, although often they are interchangeable and transpositions are rife in this system. The text aims to prevent a trade of light-squared bishops, but that is only effective in the short term as the knight will have to move again some time soon.

**8 Bh3**

This isn't compulsory and if White is troubled by the concept of Black sacrificing his b-pawn, he may wish to consider 8 Qd3!?

**8...a6**

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

8...b5 9 cxb5 a6 would see Black taking somewhat the opposite approach to the one he does in this game. One rare encounter saw 10 bxa6 c4 11 Be3 Qa5 12 Qc2 (12 Qa4!? Qxa4 13 Nxa4 Nxe4 14 Bxd7 Bxd7 15 Nb6 Rad8 16 a7 is a *Fritz*-inspired variation) 12...Bd8 13 Nf3 Bb6 14 Bxb6 Qxb6 15 0-0 Bxa6 when I guess Black had a little bit of compensation for the pawn in J.Donner-L.Kavalek, The Hague 1966. He did, however, go on to lose and one can't help but wonder whether he might have been better off playing the Benko Gambit from the off!

### 9 a4 Rb8

Black tries the less radical approach to arrange ...b5 which won't cost him a pawn.

### 10 Qd3! (Diagram 3)

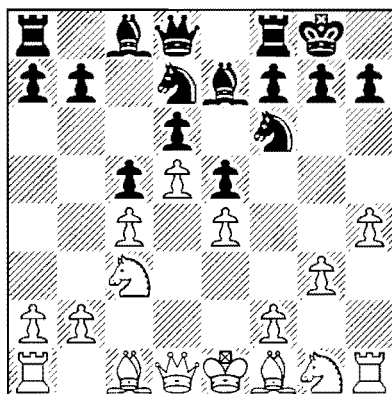


Diagram 2 (W)

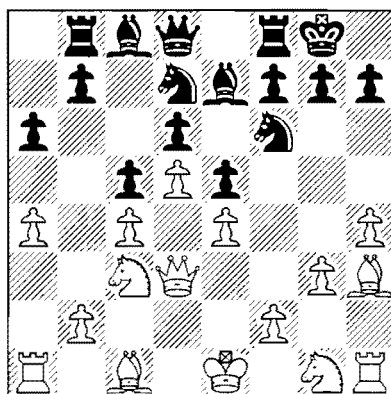


Diagram 3 (B)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** It's not going to be at all easy for Black to arrange ...b5, though, as White has just as many ways of controlling the b5-square.

### 10...b6

This is a typical insertion from club players who might be worried that White will flick in a4-a5 in order to bind the b6-square. With the a1-h8 diagonal not as open as it is in the Modern Benoni, this is a possibility for White, but gifting Black a half-open b-file in return for accepting an isolated a-pawn may not be an ideal trade. In fairness, though, the text does give Black the b7-square to work with and that helps if he wants more major pieces behind a potential ...b5 thrust. Also he has to do something and 10...Nh5 11 Kf1 Kh8 12 Kg2 Ndf6 13 Nge2 g6 14 Bh6 Ng7 15 f3 Ng8 16 Bxg7+ Kxg7 17 Bxc8 Qxc8 18 h5 left White with the initiative on the kingside in M.Chandler-R.Koch, Wiesbaden 1981.

11 Kf1 (Diagram 4)

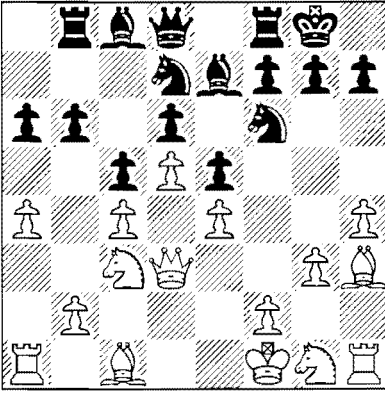


Diagram 4 (B)

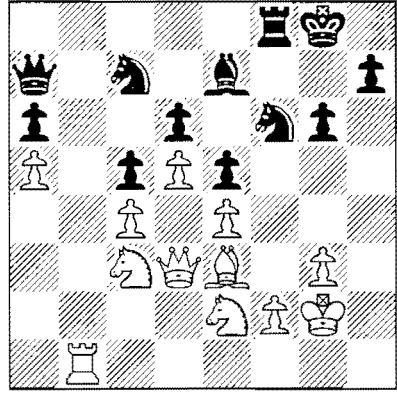


Diagram 5 (B)

Initiating one of the trademark manoeuvres of this system. Instead of castling the white king makes its way to the g2-square. Once it is there the white rooks can be connected without the king's one having to leave the potentially useful h-file. Furthermore, the text keeps open the g1-knight's options. It isn't always clear whether the knight should go to e2, where it might support its compatriot should the opponent seek premature queenside action, or to f3 where it does obstruct a quick f2-f4 push, but could later seek greener pastures on g5 or f5.

**11...Ne8 12 Kg2 Nc7 13 Nge2**

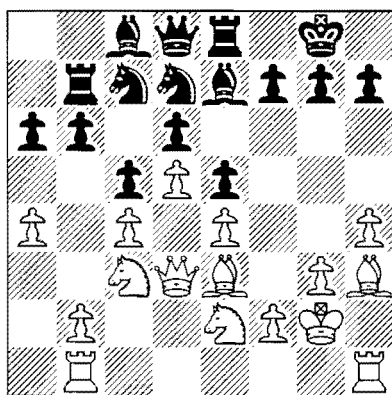
13 Nf3 was also possible, but the text seemed slightly more useful at the time. However, the story of the king's knight's ultimate destination is far from finished as you'll soon discover.

**13...Re8**

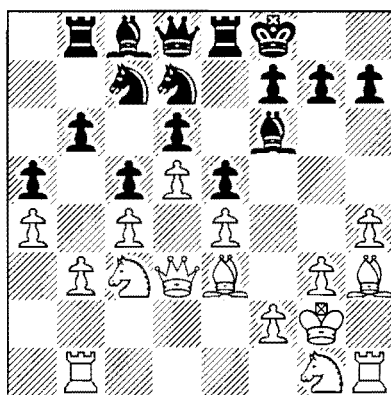
Another instructive game that highlights some of White's key concepts in this system saw Black accept the inevitable trade of good for bad bishop with 13...Nf6 14 Bxc8 Qxc8 in C.Ward-G.Lee, British Championship, Hove 1997. That continued 15 Rb1 Nd7 16 Be3 g6 17 h5 Nf6 18 hxg6 fxg6 19 b4 Qe8 20 bxc5 bxc5 21 Rxb8 Qxb8 22 Rb1 Qa7 23 a5 (**Diagram 5**) which left White with the better pawn structure and the initiative on the queenside. Note that White's f-pawn is far more likely to have an impact on the game than Black's h-pawn and indeed without an f-pawn of his own, Black could easily suffer on the e6-square.

Another reason for developing the knight to e2 can be seen after 13...b5 14 axb5 axb5 15 Nxb5 (15 cxb5 might actually be even more accurate) 15...Nxb5 16 cxb5 Qb6 17 Nc3 when Black isn't able to regain his pawn.

**14 Be3 Rb7 15 Rab1 (Diagram 6)**



**Diagram 6 (B)**



**Diagram 7 (B)**

I still have fond memories of this game and am pleased with the way that I tackled both sides of the board. The obvious point behind bringing a rook to the b-file is to prepare a pawn break over there. However it doesn't come as quickly as some might expect it to.

**15...Rb8 16 b3**

The immediate 16 b4 cxb4 17 Rxb4 Nc5 unnecessarily gives Black some action of his own.

**16...Bf6 17 Rb2! Be7 18 Rhb1 a5**

As White now has both rooks on the b-file, 18...Bf6 19 b4 would come with real force and in particular after 19...cxb4 20 Rxb4, 20...Nc5 isn't possible because of 21 Bxc5 dxc5 22 Rxb6. Hence Black deems it necessary to prevent that pawn break even at the cost of his own queenside aspirations coming to an end.

**19 Rh1**

Now White is free to concentrate on the kingside without any possible ...b5 distraction that may previously have been a concern.

**19...Bf6 20 Rbb1 Kf8**

Black's lack of space is very apparent. Transferring pieces from one side of the board to the other isn't easy and so he continues to pass, aiming to avoid creating any weaknesses.

**21 Ng1! (Diagram 7)**

White, though, has plenty of space and time to manoeuvre his pieces to good squares.



**21...Kg8 22 Nf3 Be7 23 Rbg1**

It's only a matter of time before the pawns start to roll!

**23...Rf8 24 Kf1**

Given that the main action is clearly going to be on the kingside, White could if he wanted take time out to wander his king over the queenside before things kick off. Conversely with all of his pieces in the way, Black's monarch doesn't have that option available.

**24...Ne8 25 h5 Kh8 26 Bf5 Nef6**

Thus far Black appears determined not to advance any pawns around his king and the variation 26...g6 27 hxg6 fxg6 28 Bxg6 Rxf3 29 Rxh7+ Kg8 30 Qe2 would have left White with an irresistible attack.

**27 g4 Ng8 28 g5 f6 (Diagram 8)**

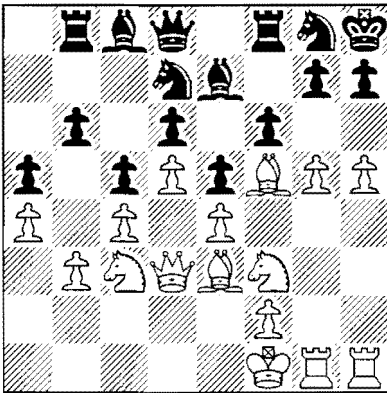


Diagram 8 (W)

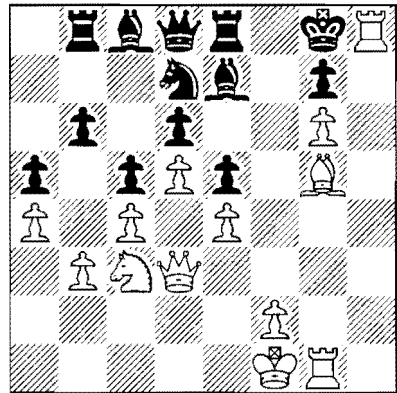


Diagram 9 (B)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Although the cynical might claim that Black has caved in with this move, it was necessary to do something as a sacrifice on h7 was definitely on the cards.

For example, 28...Rb7 29 Bxh7! (not, of course, forced as White has plenty of moves with which to first improve his position) 29...Kxh7 30 g6+ Kh8 (30 ...fxg6? 31 hxg6 is mate!) 31 h6 when Black will suffer down the h- and g-files, with 31...fxg6 32 Rxg6 Kh7 33 Rxg7+ Kh8 34 Bg5 (threatening Nh4-g6) 34...Bxg5 35 Nxg5 Ngf6 36 Qg3 but one winning variation.

**29 Bxh7!**

I simply couldn't resist this, although also tempting was 29 h6 g6 30 Bxg6 hxg6 31 h7 with 31...f5 32 Nh4! being rather powerful.

**29...Kxh7 30 g6+ Kh8 31 h6**

Black's only defender is a knight and even that is getting in the way!

**31...Nxb6 32 Bxh6 Re8**

After 32...gxh6 not only could White go material up with the g-pawn fork, but 33 Qe3 leads to forced mate.

**33 Ng5!**

33 Qe3 and 33 Qd2 also suggest themselves, but the text (threatening all sorts of things) is more visual!

**33...fxg5 34 Bxg5+ Kg8 35 Rh8+ (Diagram 9) 1-0**

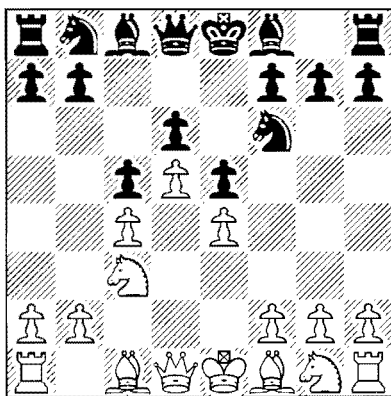
Black resigned in view of the classic finish 35...Kxh8 36 Qh3+ (okay, I confess I might have been tempted to insert 36 Rh1+ Kg8 37 Rh8+ Kxh8 first!) 36...Kg8 37 Qh7+ Kf8 38 Qh8 mate.



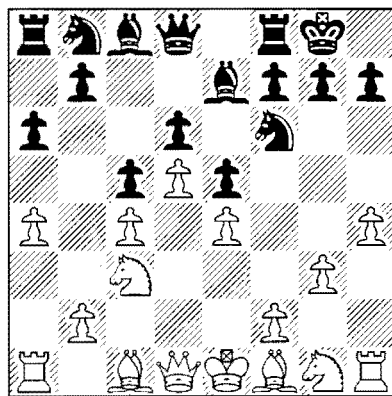
**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Aside from a very pleasurable finish this game stands out as a rare win in which my opponent didn't manage to get a pawn beyond his fourth rank or a piece beyond his third! How can you ignore an opening weapon that can deliver that sort of result?

## Looking a Little Deeper

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 (Diagram 10)**



**Diagram 10 (B)**



**Diagram 11 (B)**

Now we will examine the traditional main line of the Czech Benoni, before mov-

ing on to consider Black's other approaches.

**A: 5...Be7**

**B: 5...g6**

**C: 5...Nbd7**

**A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 g3 0-0 7 h4**

Bearing in mind that transpositions are far from uncommon, let's check out the alternatives to 7...Nbd7 which we saw in Ward-Farleigh:

**A1: 7...a6**

**A2: 7...Ne8**

**A3: 7...Na6**

**A4: 7...b5**

**A1) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 g3 0-0 7 h4 a6 8 a4 (Diagram 11)**

Black has committed his a-pawn which rules out any possibility of ...Na6. In turn White can't support the b4-break with a3, but that break may still carry some weight and, besides, White may have bigger fish to fry on the kingside. From a point of view of restricting the opponent's counterplay, the text is great as White takes control of the b5-square.

**8...b6**



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: Never forget that transpositions are rife in this system and here 8...Nbd7 9 Bh3 would take us back into Ward-Farleigh.**

Let's stop here though to see a couple of other 8th-move options:

a) 8...Ne8 9 Bh3 Nd7 (White had the better of 9...Bxh3 10 Nxh3 Nd7 11 Kf1 Nc7 12 Qd3 Rb8 13 a5 b5 14 axb6 Rxb6 15 Na4 Rb7 16 Bd2 Qb8 17 Kg2 Ne8 18 Ra3 g6 19 h5 Ng7 20 hxg6 fxg6 21 f3 Nh5 22 Nf2 Qd8 23 Qe3 Rf7 24 Nd3 Qb8 and ½-½ in N.Berry-G.Lee, British League 2002; he arguably still had a small edge in the final position due to his preferable structure, and this game also sheds further light on the already-discussed a4-a5 issue) 10 Qd3 Rb8 11 Nf3 Ndf6 12 Bxc8 Qxc8 13 h5 Bd8 14 Kf1 Qg4 15 Nh4 Nxh5 16 Nf5 **(Diagram 12)** 16...Kh8 17 Ne2 b5 18 axb5 axb5 19 b3 bxc4 20 bxc4 Qg6 21 Ra6 Bg5 22 f4 exf4 23 gxf4 f6 24 Ra7 Bxf4 25 Bxf4 Nxf4 26 Nxf4 Qg5 27 Rxh7+ Kxh7 28 Qh3+ Kg8 29 Ne7+ Kf7 30 Qe6 mate (1-0) was V.Korchnoi-H.Kuijf, Dutch League 1992. Like I said, this g3 and h4 system is rare, but this game is proof that it certainly isn't frowned upon by the World's best!

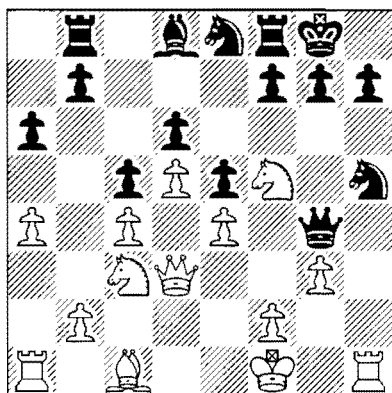


Diagram 12 (B)

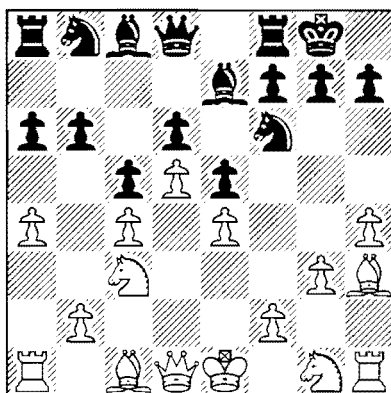


Diagram 13 (B)

b) 8...a5 (again we see Black buy the b4-square and at the cost of having to kiss goodbye to any potential ...b5 break) 9 Bh3 Na6 10 Be3 Nb4 11 Qe2 Ne8 12 0-0-0 f5?! 13 Bxf5 Bxf5 14 exf5 Rxf5 15 Nh3 Nc7 16 Ng5 gave White a comfortable edge in M.Gerusel-E.Reicher, Wijk aan Zee 1973. Black does have the opportunity here to offload his bad bishop, but that would come at the large cost of opening the h-file.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Here ...f5 was Black's only available break, but it wasn't great as it donated the e4-square to White. However, Black was struggling as ...f5 couldn't be satisfactorily prepared with ...g6 because of h4-h5, followed by the likely opening of the h-file.

### 9 Bh3 (Diagram 13) 9...Ne8

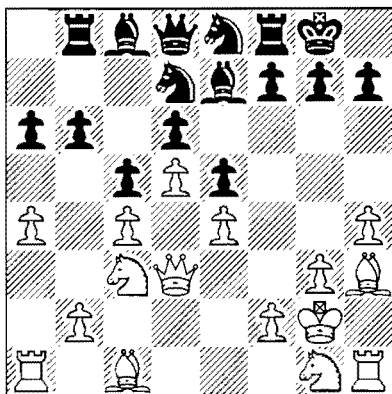
Once again practice has seen some different approaches:

a) 9...Bd7 10 Qe2 Ne8 11 Be3 Qc8 12 Bxd7 Nxd7 13 Nf3 Ndf6 certainly doesn't offer Black anything and 14 Nh2 Nc7 15 g4 Qd7 16 g5 Nfe8 17 Qg4 f5 18 exf5 Qxf5 19 Qxf5 Rxf5 20 Ke2 a5 21 Nf1 Na6 22 Ng3 Rf8 23 Raf1 Nb4 24 f4 exf4 25 Rxf4 Nc2 26 Rxf8+ Bxf8 27 Nb5 Nxe3 28 Kxe3 g6 29 Ne4 left Black particularly passive in H.Kock-P.Schaad, Triesen 2006.

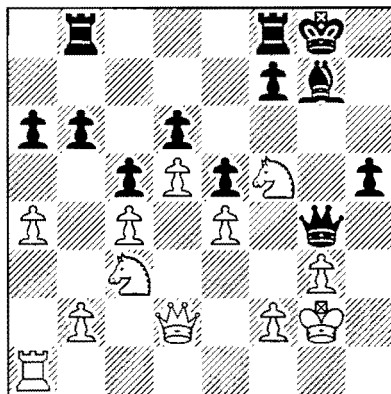
b) After 9...Bxh3 10 Nxh3 Nbd7 11 Kf1 Ne8 12 Kg2 Rb8 13 Qe2 Nc7 I decided to focus on the queenside in one of my own games and following 14 Rb1 Rb7 15 b4 cxb4 16 Rxb4 a5 17 Rb2 Na6 18 Be3 Ndc5 19 f3 Qd7 20 Bxc5 Nxc5 21 Rb5 Rc8 22 Nf2 Qc7 23 Rc1 Nd7 24 Ncd1 Qd8 25 Ne3 g6 26 Nd3 Ra7 27 Rcb1 Bf8 I was par-

ticularly happy with the positional pawn sacrifice 28 c5!? bxc5 29 Nc4. As in all Benoni lines c4 is an excellent square for a white knight and 29...f5 30 Rb7 Rxb7 31 Rxb7 fxe4 32 fxe4 Nf6 33 Nf2 Rb8 34 Qb2 Rxb7 35 Qxb7 Qd7 36 Qb3 Bh6 37 Nxa5 Bd2 38 Nc4 Be1 39 Qb8+ Kg7 40 Qxd6 Qxa4 41 Qe7+ Kh6 42 Qf8+ Kh5 43 Qxf6 and 1-0 in C.Ward-J.Sugden, Kent League 1992 was rather enjoyable!

**10 Kf1 Nd7 11 Kg2 Rb8 12 Qd3 (Diagram 14)**



**Diagram 14 (B)**



**Diagram 15 (B)**

This should be pretty familiar stuff by now. Unlike in the introductory game we will now see Black try to generate some play, but White is ready with a suitable riposte.

**12...g6 13 h5 Ng7 14 hxc6 hxc6**

Instead 14...fxg6 15 Nf3 would simply leave Black with the inferior structure and with a gaping hole on e6.

**15 Nf3 Nf6**

Black's hope is that he won't get mated down the open h-file. However even if he doesn't, he's still saddled with a lousy dark-squared bishop!

**16 Bh6 Ng4 17 Qd2**

Now there are some serious threats down the h-file and White is already doing pretty well. The game C.Ward-A.Beveridge, Hastings 1996, continued 17...Bf6 18 Bxg7 (far from forced, but the bishop-for-knight concession is based on a simple positional concept) 18...Bxg7 19 Nh2 Nf6 20 Bxc8 Qxc8 21 Nf3 Nh5 22 Rxh5! gxh5 23 Nh4 Qg4 24 Nf5 (**Diagram 15**) and White's f5-knight was greatly superior to Black's dreadful bishop. Furthermore, 25 f3, trapping Black's queen, was threatened as well as the plan of Rh1-h4, not to mention simply snaffling the d6-pawn.

A2) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 g3 0-0 7 h4 Ne8 (Diagram 16)

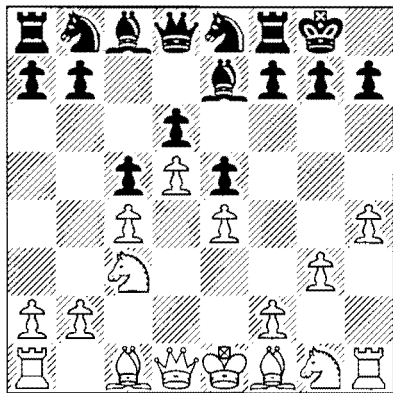


Diagram 16 (W)

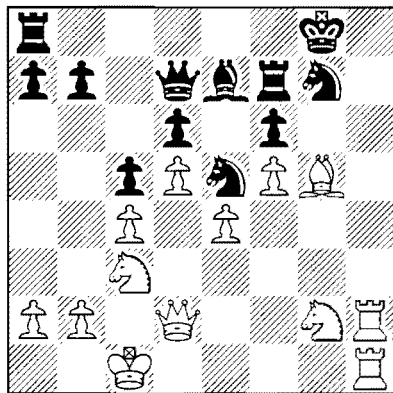


Diagram 17 (B)

This is a flexible move which keeps Black's options open, even if it no longer threatens ...Bg5.

### 8 Bh3 Nd7

Although Colin won't thank me for saying this, I did have a little chuckle when I saw 8...Nc7 9 Qd3 (9 Kf1!? Bxh3+ 10 Nxh3 f5 11 exf5 Rxf5 12 Ng5 favours White because of his control of the e4-square where a knight will sit very pretty; I guess that the key question is whether Black gets enough play for the pawn with 10...b5 instead) 9...Nd7 10 Nge2 b5!? 11 cxb5 a6 12 b6?! Nxb6 13 Bxc8 Qxc8 14 a4 a5 15 g4 Na6 16 Qg3 Nb4 17 0-0 Qa6 18 f4 exf4 19 Bxf4 Rad8 20 Rad1 Nxa4 21 Rd2 Nb6 22 Nc1 Nc4 23 Rg2 Bf6 24 Re1 Be5 25 g5 Bxf4 26 Qxf4 Ne5 27 Re3 f6 28 gxf6 Ng6 29 Qg4 Rxf6 30 N1e2 Rf7 31 Ng3 Rdf8 32 Nf5 Kh8 33 Reg3 Ne7 34 Qg5 Nxf5 35 exf5 Qc4 36 Rg4 Qb3? 37 f6 g6 38 h5 Rg8 39 Qh6 Rxf6 40 hxg6 Rg7 41 Re4 Rf8 42 Re7 Rfg8 43 Qxh7+ and 1-0 in T.Gavriel-C.Crouch, Sutton 1999. Actually that's about as much counterplay as I've ever seen Black get against our system, and it's clear that he was doing rather well before things went incredibly pear-shaped on the kingside!



**BEWARE!** This game should serve as a warning that White should not underestimate Black's ...b5 break. If worried he could flick in a4 even before Black has played ...a6, but specifically in this game Gavriel's placing of his king's knight left a lot to be desired!

Returning to the norm (!) though, and 8...g6 9 Bh6 Ng7 10 h5 f6 11 hxg6 hxg6 12 Qd2 Rf7 13 Nf3 Bxh3 14 Rxxh3 g5 15 Rh2 Nd7 16 0-0-0 Nf8 17 Rdh1 Ng6 18 Ne1 Bf8 19 f4 exf4 20 gxf4 Be7 21 Ng2 Qd7 22 f5 Ne5 23 Bxg5 (**Diagram 17**) and 1-0 in I.Martinez Alfonso-V.Zaiats, Barcelona 2001, demonstrated just how dangerous White's kingside initiative can be.

### 9 Kf1

The usual story sees White parking his king on g2 before deciding whether his knight will go to f3 or e2.

### 9...a6

Supporting ...b5, which if played immediately would simply be captured by White's knight.

### 10 Kg2

An immediate 10 a4 is also possible if White is worried about ...b5.

### 10...Ndf6 11 a4 Kh8 12 h5 Ng8 (Diagram 18)

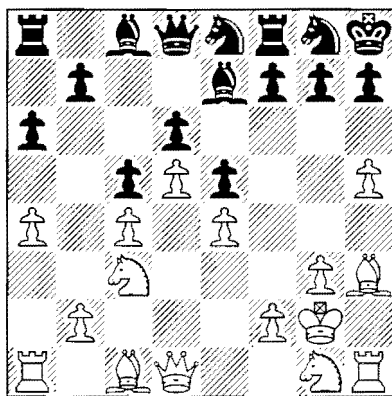


Diagram 18 (W)

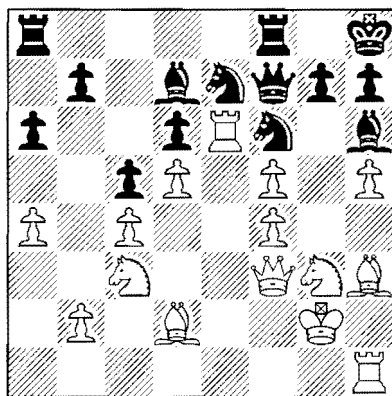


Diagram 19 (B)

Just like in Ward-Farleigh, Black is rather cramped. In I.Nikolaidis-A.Karayannis, Halkida 1997, he tried to exploit the further advance of the white h-pawn, but was unable to exchange his bad bishop in any case:

### 13 Qd3 Bg5 14 f4!

Clearly White's justification for delaying Nf3.

### 14...exf4 15 gxf4 Bh6

Upon 15...Bf6 16 Nf3 White would soon be looking towards advancing with e4-e5.

### 16 Nge2

16 Nf3 also looks good as White could always meet 16...f5 with 17 e5.

## 16...f5

This is Black's only realistic chance at counterplay, but White has a clever way of turning it to his own advantage.

**17 exf5! Ne7 18 Ng3 Nf6 19 Bd2 Qe8 20 Rae1 Qf7 21 Qf3 Bd7 22 Re6! (Diagram 19)**

A thematic exchange sacrifice. Although no doubt Black was reluctant to accept it, if the rook is ignored then either pressure will build up down the e-file or the d6-pawn will simply be removed. Nikolaidis-Karayannis continued 22...Bxe6 23 fxe6 Qe8 24 Nf5 Nxf5 25 Bxf5 Qd8 26 Bc2! Kg8 27 Ne4 b5 28 Qd3 bxc4 29 Nxf6+ Rxf6 30 Qxh7+ Kf8 31 Rh3 Ke7 32 Rg3 Qh8 33 Qe4 Qf8 34 Rg4 Qe8 35 Bc3 Qf8 36 f5 Rb8 37 Qxc4 Rxf5 38 Qxa6 Rf2+ (finally Black gets a piece into the opposition half, but it's a little late!) 39 Kg1 Rf1+ 40 Qxf1 1-0.

**A3) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 g3 0-0 7 h4 Na6 (Diagram 20)**

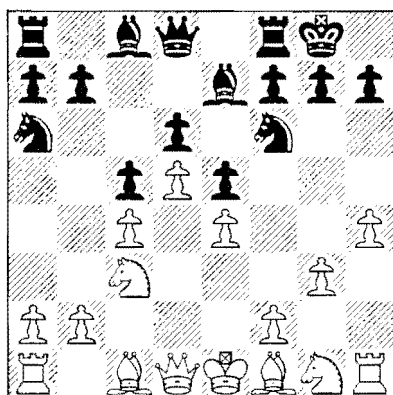


Diagram 20 (W)

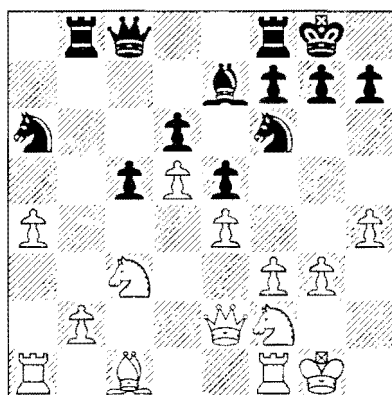


Diagram 21 (B)

Black has refrained from an early ...a6 so as to use that square for his queen's knight.

## 8 Bh3 Nc7

It's almost inevitable that the light-squared bishops will be swapped, but Black has the choice of deciding where they will be exchanged. After 8...Bxh3 9 Nxh3 a few practical examples are:

a) 9...b5 10 cxb5 Nc7 11 a4 (events also favoured White after 11 g4 Qd7 12 g5 Nfe8 13 a4 Rb8 14 Qe2 Qc8 15 Bd2 a6 16 Ra3 Bd8 17 f3 g6 18 Nf2 Ng7 19 Qc4 axb5 20 axb5 Qd7 21 Ra7 in W.Addison-E.Vasiukov, Reykjavik 1968) 11...Qb8 12 0-0 a6 13



bxa6 Nxa6 14 f3 Qc8 15 Nf2 Rb8 16 Qe2 (**Diagram 21**) occurred in C.Ward-W.Hartston, Barnsdale 1989. Black has some Benko-like pressure along the b-file, but his bad bishop here is nothing like the fianchettoed one that usually bears down on White's queenside.

or 9...Nc7 10 a4 b6 was tried in B.Addison-G.Lee, British Championship, Torquay 2002, and now the usual 11 Kf1-g2 seems indicated.

or 9...Qd7 10 Kf1 Nc7 11 a4 a6 12 a5 Rab8 13 Bd2 b5 14 axb6 Rxb6 15 Na4 Rb7 16 Qe2 Rb3 17 Kg2 Nfe8 18 Qd1 Rb7 19 Qc2 g6 20 h5 Ng7 21 hxg6 fxg6 22 f3 left White with a structural advantage in M.Cebalo-M.Cornette, Subotica 2005.

## 9 a4

This isn't forced but is certainly the simplest way for White to knock Black's ...b5 aspirations on the head.

## 9...Na6

We have already seen the sort of things that might happen if Black plays 9...b6 or ...a6, both aiming to play ...b5 in the long run, but the text reintroduces a familiar Benoni idea. Now that the b4-square is an outpost, the black knight intends to occupy it. Just how useful that is though in the general scheme of things remains to be seen.

## 10 Kf1 Nb4 11 Kg2 Bd7 (Diagram 22)

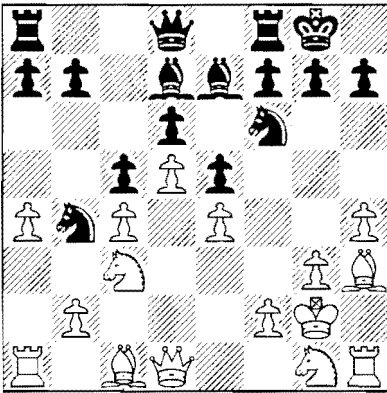


Diagram 22 (W)

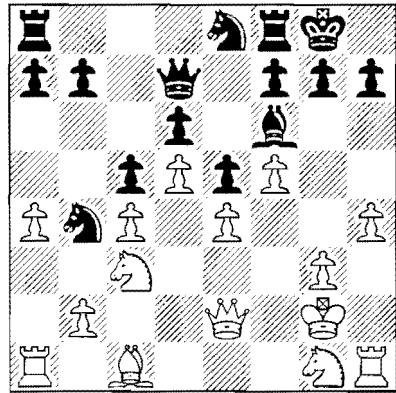


Diagram 23 (B)

## 12 Qe2

It is actually debatable whether in general it is this square or d3 that is best for the white queen. From both squares her majesty controls b5 as well as supporting the e4-pawn, but personally I have tended to favour d3 as it adds some extra control

over f5 and leaves the e2-square vacant for a knight. Here of course there is no choice.

## 12...Qc8 13 f3

The f2-square is often useful to help manoeuvre a knight elsewhere from h3.

## 13...Ne8 14 f4!? Bf6

14...exf4 15 gxf4 f5 16 e5 would leave White completely bossing the centre, but given how things soon turn out, Black might be best off trying to mix things up with 14...f5!?

## 15 Bxd7 Qxd7 16 f5 (Diagram 23)

We're following the game C.Ward-J.Pedersen, Aarhus 1993, and now get to see a case of 'Squash city Arizona' as White advances on the kingside: 16...g6 17 g4 Ng7 18 Bh6 Kh8 19 g5 Bd8 20 Bxg7+ Kxg7 21 f6+ Kg8 22 h5 Ba5 23 Rh4! Na6 24 Nh3 Bxc3 25 bxc3 Rac8 26 Nf2 Rc7 27 Ng4 Qe8 28 Qf3 b6 29 Rf1 Kh8 (29...Nb8 30 hxg6 fxg6 31 f7+ Rcx7 32 Nh6+ highlights what Black was trying to avoid with the text) 30 Rfh1 Qd8 31 hxg6 fxg6 (Diagram 24) 32 Rxh7+! Rxh7 33 Rxh7+ Kxh7 34 Qh3+ Kg8 35 Nh6+ Kh7 36 Nf5+ Kg8 37 Ne7+ Kf7 38 Qe6+ 1-0.

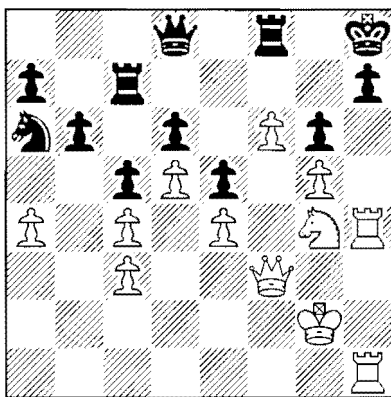


Diagram 24 (W)

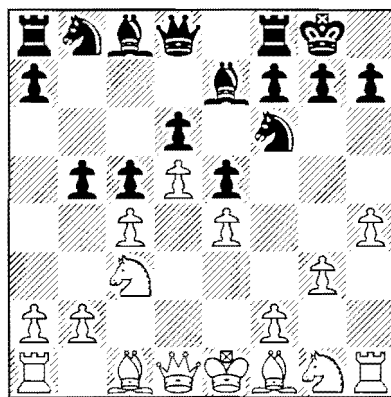


Diagram 25 (W)

## A4) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Be7 6 g3 0-0 7 h4 b5 (Diagram 25)

Given that White has created a hole on g2 and expended another tempo on h2-h4 there is a certain logic to this offering.

## 8 cxb5

However, at the end of the day a pawn is a pawn!

## 8...a6 9 bxa6 Nbd7

Consistent with the Benko as Black delays recapturing the a-pawn until White has

committed his kingside. However although 9...Bxa6 10 Nf3 would most likely see White be quite comfortable after a Nd2-c4 manoeuvre, possibly Black's most interesting idea is 9...Nxa6!? which keeps his light-squared bishop flexible and the c8-h3 diagonal open. The main point can be seen in the murky variation 10 Nf3 Bg4 11 Be2 Nb4 and while there may be room for such subtle ideas as 10 Be2, it's easy to understand why 10 h5!? Nd7 11 g4 Nb6 12 Nh3 c4 13 Be3 Nb4 14 Be2 Nd3+ 15 Bxd3 cxd3 16 b3 Bh4 17 Kf1 Nd7 18 Kg2 featured in the fascinating game M.Gerusel-J.Haakert, German League 1976.

### 10 Nf3

Actually White has other moves here too, but this seems like the most sensible and straightforward.

### 10...Qa5

Or 10...Bxa6 11 Bxa6 Rxa6 12 Qd3 when Nd2 should feature next. The point behind White's last move is that his knight wants to occupy the c4-square.

### 11 Nd2! (Diagram 26)

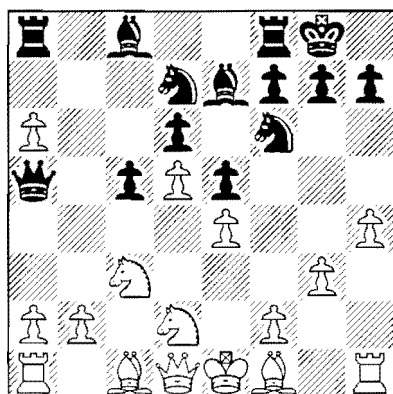


Diagram 26 (B)

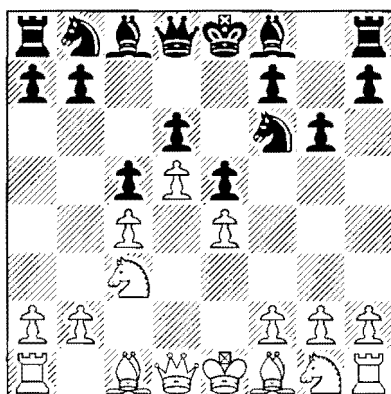


Diagram 27 (W)

### 11...Bxa6 12 Bxa6 Rxa6

After 12...Qxa6 13 Qe2 Black surely can't afford to trade queens. However, after, say, 13...Qb7 White could simply castle or expand immediately on the kingside with the likes of g4 and h5. In all cases total control of the c4-square is very handy!

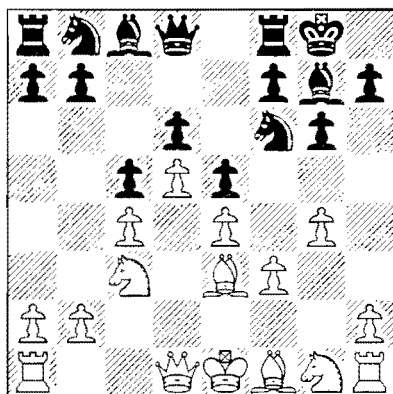
### 13 Qe2 Rfa8 14 0-0 Qd8 15 Nc4 Nb6 16 b3

Essentially Black was just a pawn down in H.Lehmann-W.Hartston, Adalboden 1969.

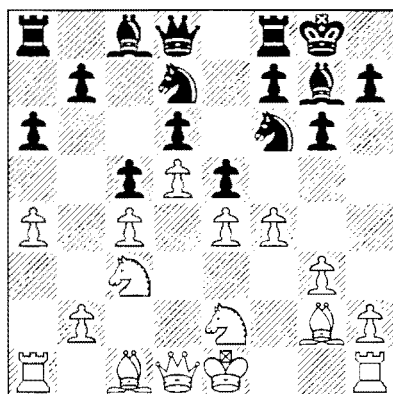
**B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 g6 (Diagram 27)**

This is the other main way for Black to play the Czech Benoni. The truth is that I am proud of my contributions to the *Dangerous Weapons* series and I have been very prepared to practice what I've preached! Thus I would feel uncomfortable advocating something outrageously dubious and I'm certainly not going to change my tune here. Basically how White handles 5...g6 should probably be related to the way in which he responds to the King's Indian.

For example, if White normally enters the 'Classical Variation' then we might see 6 Be2 Bg7 7 Nf3 0-0 8 0-0 when presumably there might be the typical kingside versus queenside debate. Alternatively, a different piece configuration is 6 Bd3 Bg7 7 Nge2, while as I like to play the Sämisch Variation, it may come as no surprise that my games have seen 6 f3 Bg7 7 Be3 0-0 8 g4? **(Diagram 28).**



**Diagram 28 (B)**



**Diagram 29 (B)**

**C) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 e5 4 Nc3 d6 5 e4 Nbd7**

It's very much a matter of taste how to respond to 5...g6 and that's also the case with regard to the recent appearance of the flexible text. The crafty point is that Black doesn't commit himself to either ...g6 or ...Be7 and such flexibility might annoy White a little. In particular this idea is designed to thwart a restrictive h3 and g4 system as Black has often then flicked an early ...h5 and even ...h4 into the mix.

**6 g3**

By no means the only approach, but now 6...Be7 would take us back into the main body of this chapter. Meanwhile Black doesn't know whether White intends h2-h4 or f2-f4, and I don't think that White should fear 6...h5 as after 7 h4 the g5-square will be more useful to White than g4 will be to Black. Do bear in mind that getting in ...f5 will be impractical with the light-squared bishops exchanged and the e6-

square just begging to be invaded.

To finish, I'll offer some food for thought from the recent game C.Bates-P.Navarro Torres, Gibraltar 2008:

**6...a6 7 a4 g6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 Nge2 0-0 10 f4!? (Diagram 29)**

Ambitious and I'm not entirely sure about the position after 10...exf4 11 gxf4 Nh5 12 0-0 f5 13 exf5 gxf5, although analysis engines prefer White and he did go on to win!

## Conclusion

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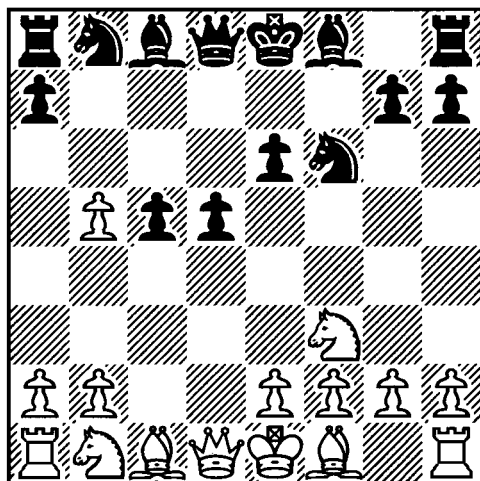
Early wing play is perfectly acceptable when the centre is either under control or closed. Although it certainly isn't considered to be one of the main lines, I have enjoyed playing g3 and h4 against the Czech Benoni ever since I took it up when I was just 11! Okay since then I have fine tuned it a bit, but I have to say that my results have been fantastic. If you choose to employ this attractive system, I hope that you are equally successful!

## Chapter Nine

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# Adventures in the Blumenfeld Accepted

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5!? 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 (Diagram 1)**



**Diagram 1 (W)**

An interesting alternative to entering the Modern Benoni, especially for the Nimzo player, is the aggressive 4...b5. Although over the years the Blumenfeld Counter Gambit has never been consistently used by any of the world's leading players, it

is noticeable that several strong players have been known to employ it as a weapon on occasion. Indeed, over the past year leading grandmasters Nisipeanu, Wojtaszek and Alekseev have enjoyed great success with it.

In chess openings in general I would say that nowadays gambits are viewed with an air of scepticism, partly due to the rise of materialistic computer programs. Indeed, although White can decline the Blumenfeld with 5 Bg5, the acid test must be when he accepts the pawn on offer, as we will explore here. In return for his pawn, Black finds himself in charge in the centre and he will gain pressure down the half-open f-file as soon as he castles.

Rather than a comprehensive survey of this variation, I shall explore some ideas for Black against each of White's main continuations. Personally, I rather like playing this gambit with Black and have done so with some success:

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□ R. Van Wessel ■ C. Ward

Ghent 2005

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1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 7 Nbd2 (Diagram 2)

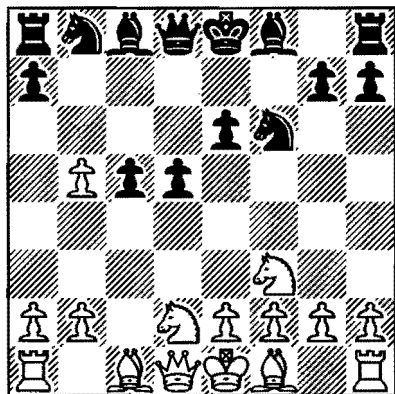


Diagram 2 (B)

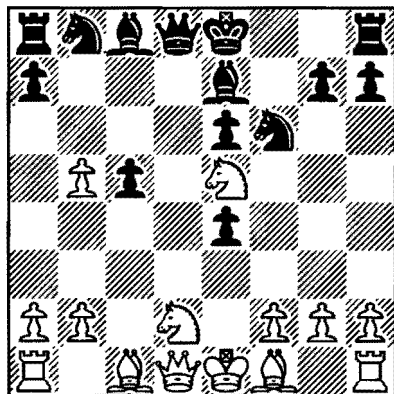


Diagram 3 (B)

Prior to 2003 this move had only occurred on five occasions. Then amazingly in two unconnected encounters, in the sense that my second opponent couldn't have known about my unpublished first game, I faced it twice within a fortnight! I have noticed that the flexible text has appeared more often in recent times, but I wouldn't call it the most challenging of White's options, even though one of his main aims is to test Black's central resolve with e2-e4.

7...Be7

This seemed like a sensible option and I did repeat it a few days later because of the obvious success of this first encounter. Although the bishop might appear more active on d6, I was anticipating facing a kingside fianchetto. Then the dark-squared bishop would not only bite on granite, but would also be vulnerable to an e4-e5 push.

It now strikes me, though, that Black has a few other promising options, including:

- a) 7...Qa5 8 e3 Bd7 9 Be2 Bxb5 10 0-0 Bxe2 11 Qxe2 Qa6 saw Black quickly regain his pawn and not suffer for the expended tempi in doing so in E.Degtiarev-L.Kritz, European Championship, Dresden 2007.
- b) 7...a6 8 bxa6 (after 8 e4 Be7 9 exd5 exd5 10 Be2 0-0 11 0-0 c4 12 bxa6 Nc6 White's d2-knight was left awkwardly placed in A.Kopylov-R.Ovetchkin, Salekhard 2006, and here the immediate 8...c4 looks reasonable too) 8...Bxa6 9 b3 Nc6 10 Bb2 Be7 11 g3 0-0 12 Bg2 Qd6 13 0-0 e5 saw Black's active pieces compliment his impressive pawn centre and gave him promising compensation in M.Serik-T.Iljin, Donetsk 2008.

### 8 g3

My second encounter witnessed the double-edged 8 e4 dxe4 9 Ne5 (**Diagram 3**). Here Gutman has recommended 9...Bb7!?, with the idea of 10 Bc4 Qd4.



**BEWARE!** Instead 9...Qd5 10 Ng4 Bb7 11 Bc4 Qf5 12 Ne3 Qe5 13 Be2 Nbd7 14 0-0 0-0 15 Ndc4 Qc7 16 Bd2 Nd5 17 Bg4 left me suffering in T.Nixon-C.Ward, British Championship, Douglas 2005, and I was relieved to be offered a draw at this point.

To be honest I didn't enjoy this game one bit from 9 Ne5 onwards. Okay, I admit that I had only seriously considered 9 Ng5 Qd5 when capturing on e4; a decision which I soon regretted. Although Gutman clearly believes that active piece play tenders good compensation, Black must keep in mind structural considerations. Thus he should probably simply castle on move 8.

### 8...0-0 9 Bg2 (**Diagram 4**) 9...Qb6

As you will discover throughout this chapter, an important idea is to make the pawn sacrifice permanent. Indeed, 9...a6!? looks very reasonable here, after which 10 bxa6 Rxa6 11 0-0 Bb7 12 b3 Nbd7 13 Bb2 Qa8 saw Black successfully keep her options open on both flanks in C.Flear-M.Sebag, Marseilles 2001.

### 10 0-0

Had White protected the pawn with 10 a4 then I most certainly intended 10...a6!. The b4-square is irrevocably weakened and so 11 bxa6 Nxa6 12 0-0 Nb4 makes sense, as does 11...Nc6, keeping the option open over how to recapture on a6.



### 10...Qxb5 11 e4

White's idea was that it would cost Black some time to regain the pawn, leaving him still to develop his queenside pieces. However, the queen is reasonably placed on b5 and it's not going to be as easy for White as 'give Black hanging pawns and then win them'!

### 11...Nc6 12 Re1

This doesn't help in view of my powerful reply. Instead 12 b3 prevents Black's next move, but then, amongst others, an ...a5-a4 plan suggests itself.

### 12...c4! (Diagram 5)

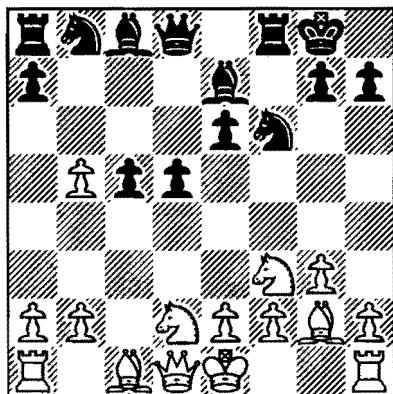


Diagram 4 (B)

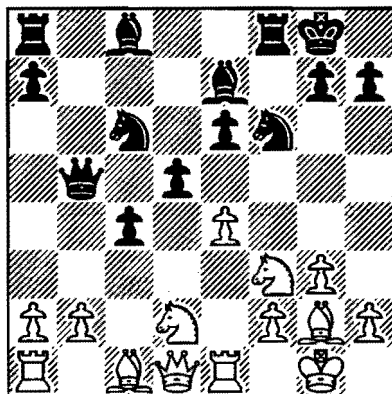


Diagram 5 (W)

Black prepares to attack down the g1-a7 diagonal, while making it difficult for White to complete his development.

### 13 h3?!

White spots the danger behind a future ...Ng4, but the text rather weakens g3. Van Wessel's position is already a little difficult, though, and do note that 13 b3 clearly wasn't on either because of 13...c3.

### 13...Bc5!?

Others might have been tempted by 13...d4, but it's difficult to argue with the text.

### 14 e5 (Diagram 6) 14...Bxf2+!



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** I can actually recall quite liking both 14...Nd7 and 14...Nh5, but like a kid in a candy store, I simply couldn't resist this attractive sacrifice!

## 15 Kxf2 Qb6+

Now the white king is destined for some serious grief as it is unable to retreat to g1.

## 16 Kf1

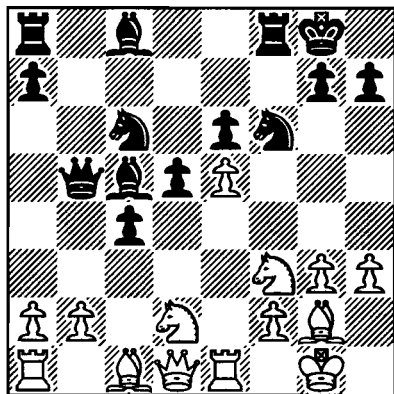


Diagram 6 (B)

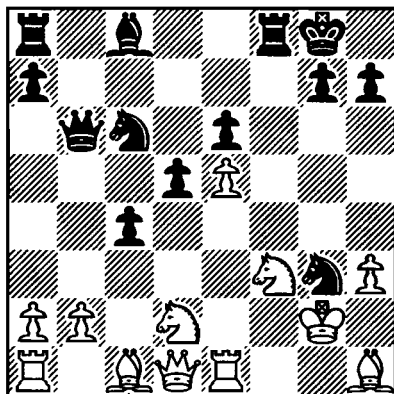


Diagram 7 (B)

Upon the self-pin 16 Re3, both 16...Ne4+ and 16...Nxe5, intending 17 Nxe5 Ng4+, look pretty strong.

## 16...Nh5

Threatening checkmate, and one which White has to go into contortions to prevent.

## 17 Bh1 Nxe5 18 Kg2 (Diagram 7) 18...Nxe5

Again I seemed to be spoilt for choice. As it happens, I was ultimately proven right that following this trade my own light-squared bishop would eventually rule supreme. However, obviously it crossed my mind to leave White's ridiculous-looking bishop on the board, and in fairness probably both 18...Nf5 and 18...Nh5!? are good too.

## 19 Kxh1 Bb7 20 Rg1

Black seems to be the boss of the g1-a7 and h1-a8 diagonals, not to mention the f-file too. White's only source of counterplay is the g-file and so he sets about making the most of it.

## 20...Rf5 21 Qe1 Raf8 22 Qg3 Qc7!

The queen was no longer required on the g1-a7 diagonal, as it is the light-squared diagonal that will soon be the focus of attention.

## 23 Nh4 R5f7

Although obviously I was happy with the outcome of this game, it would appear that I missed the chance to be even more emphatic with 23...Nxe5!!, as 24 Nxf5 d4+ 25 Kh2 Rxf5 brings with it a massive threat of 26...Rf2+ and the chance of a ...Ng4 double check and mate!

#### 24 Ndf3 d4

This is the sort of thing I envisaged when taking that bishop on h1.

#### 25 Kh2 (Diagram 8)

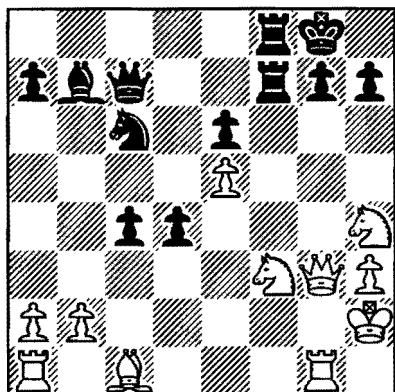


Diagram 8 (B)

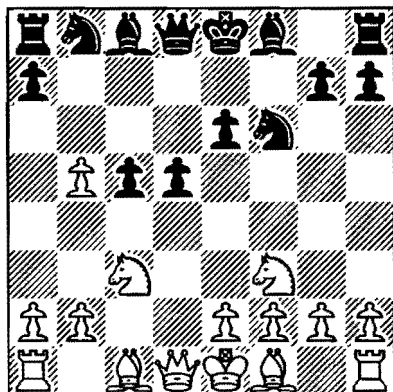


Diagram 9 (B)

#### 25...Rxf3!!

Who could resist such a double exchange sacrifice?

#### 26 Nxf3 Rxf3! 27 Qxf3 Nxe5 28 Qf4

White needed to guard against the discovered and double check, and 28 Qg3 Nf3+ 29 Kg2 Nxe5 was clearly inferior.

#### 28...Nf3+ 29 Kg3

White is defenceless and later analysis confirmed that 29 Kg2 e5 30 Qg4 Qf7 would also have been winning for Black.

#### 29...e5 30 Qf5

Desperate would have been 30 Qxf3 Bxf3 31 Kxf3 when White would have lacked coordination in the face of Black's pawn armada and rampaging queen.

#### 30...Nxe5 31 Qe6+ Qf7

The queen exchange was forced, but in the endgame Black has far too many pawns for the exchange.

#### 32 Qxf7+ Kxf7 33 Bd2 Nf3 34 Rf1 e4 35 Bb4 a6 36 Bc5 d3 37 Kf4 Ke6 38 Ke3 Kd5 39

**Bb4 Bc8 40 Rh1 g5 41 Be7 h6 42 Bf8 Nd4 0-1**

White resigned as the knight will force his king to abandon its blockade.

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☐ **D.Buckley** ☒ **C.Ward**

British League 2004

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**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 7 Nc3 (Diagram 9)**

I've always felt that this is the most critical move as White gets straight to the point with regards to preparing the challenging e2-e4 advance. Even when White plays 7 e3 (Line A of the Looking a Little Deeper section), he still has the ultimate aim of advancing the e-pawn to e4. It is possible that many may have been put off of the text move because of 7...d4. However, in that instance after 8 Na4 Black's pawns get out of shape and it is very possible that they could be undermined by a future b2-b4.

**7...Bb7**

This move and what follows was actually prepared by me when I was a student in a gap year before university. Evidently, I didn't actually reap the rewards until quite some time later! Excellent news for the reader is that although I am focusing on this move which can easily catch out the unprepared, Black does have some other very reasonable options. In particular, 7...Nbd7 8 e4 d4 9 e5 Ng4 10 Ne4 and now 10...Bb7! is stronger than taking on e5.



**ROLL THE DICE!** If interested readers want to travel away from our main game, they should investigate this possibility and here 11 Bd3 c4! 12 Nxd4 Bb4+ 13 Nc3 Qh4! is but one attractive variation.

**8 e4**

8 e3 might well to transpose to Line A, below, but the text must be the acid test.

**8...d4**

Some players have dabbled in taking the pawn on e4, but to me it just looks too ugly!

**9 e5**

Instead 9 Na4 Bxe4 10 Bc4 Bd5 has failed to trouble Black in practice.

**9...Nfd7 (Diagram 10)**

Following my old preparation and I still prefer to stay away from both 9...Ng4 10 h3 Nh6 and 9...dxc3 10 Qxd8+ Kxd8 11 exf6 which others have been known to try.

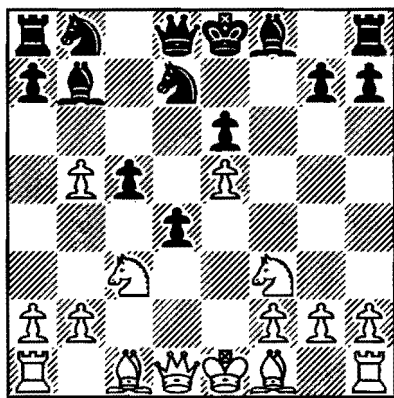
**10 Na4**

This knight has to give ground and it can't use e2 as that would leave its colleague

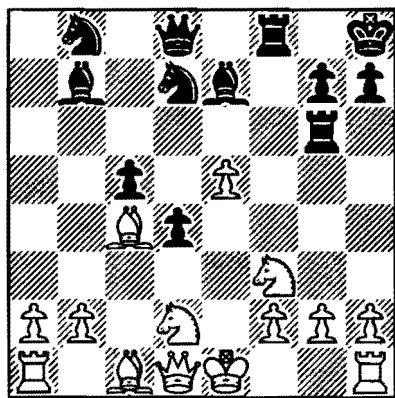
on f3 vulnerable to capture. On a4 the knight helps pressurize c5, but if it returns to base, it can hope to later reach one of the c4- or e4-squares. After 10 Nb1 we have:

a) Very worthwhile viewing is the recent encounter K.Landa-M.Turov, Krasnoyarsk 2007: 10...a6!? 11 Na3 Bd5 12 bxa6 Nc6 13 Bc4 Ndx5 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Qh5+ Ng6 16 Bg5 Be7 17 Bxe7 Qxe7 18 0-0 Bxc4 19 Nxc4 0-0 20 g3 Rxa6 ½-½.

b) Nevertheless, most of my energy has gone into 10...Be7 11 Bc4 (11 Nbd2 0-0 12 Bd3 is an alternative development sequence, but then 11...Qc7 highlights White's lack of ways to guard e5) 11...0-0. My idea was to gain counterplay after 12 Bxe6+ Kh8 13 Nbd2 with 13...a6 14 bxa6 Rxa6 15 Bc4 Rg6 (**Diagram 11**), but I guess that 12 Nbd2 is more prudent. I did then once have a crazy game with grandmaster Mark Hebden that went 12...Kh8 13 0-0 a6 14 bxa6 Nxa6 15 Bxe6 Nb4 16 Nc4 Ra6 17 Bg4 Bd5 18 b3 Qe8 19 Ne1 Bh4 20 f4 Bxc4 21 Bxd7 Qxd7 22 bxc4 Bxe1 23 Rxe1 d3, but I'm not too sure about all of that! Indeed, I quite like the standard 12...a6!? and after 13 bxa6 there is the dainty 13...Bd5!?. Black will pick up the a6-pawn at his leisure and his bishop on d5 is a rock, which if taken will result in a very attractive central pawn mass.



**Diagram 10 (W)**



**Diagram 11 (W)**

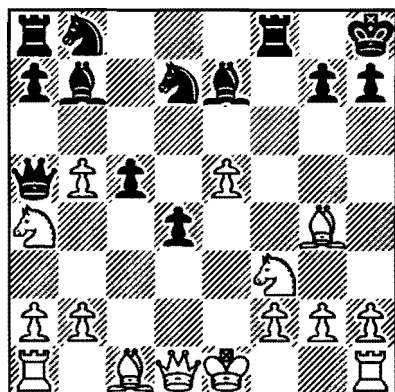
### 10...Be7 11 Bc4 0-0!

The knight on a4 may have had notions of targeting Black's queenside, but it couldn't be worse placed for offering help to the kingside and particularly the pressure that is mounting on f3.

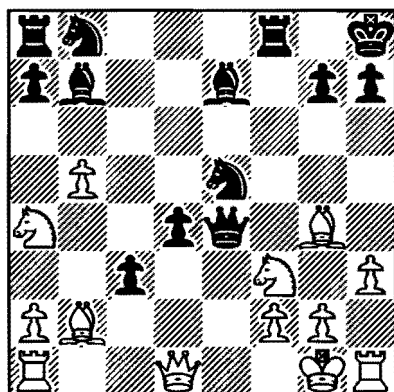
### 12 Bxe6+ Kh8 13 Bg4

So White's light-squared bishop has got to work, but now Buckley is punished for not finding the time to extract his king from the centre.

**13...Qa5+! (Diagram 12)**



**Diagram 12 (W)**



**Diagram 13 (W)**

**14 Kf1**

After 14 Bd2 Qxb5 White's king would be stuck in the middle and his a4-knight a liability.

**14...Qxb5+ 15 Kg1 Qc6!**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Now there is a powerful X-ray through to the g2-pawn and already White's position is a picture of disarray!

**16 h3**

It is understandable that White didn't fancy 16 e6 Ne5, not that the text really helps him.

**16...Nxe5 17 b4**

White's position is horrible, but he makes a token effort at counterplay.

**17...c4 18 b5**

After 18 Qxd4 Nxg4 19 hxg4 the a4-knight hangs and Black might even flick in 19...Bf6 first.

**18...Qe4 19 Bb2 c3 (Diagram 13)**

It's resignable, but White throws in a couple more moves just to reach the twenty move mark!

**20 Bxc3 Nxg4 21 hxg4 dxc3 0-1**

## Looking a Little Deeper

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5**

We have already looked into both 7 Nbd2 and 7 Nc3. Now it's time to investigate the alternatives:

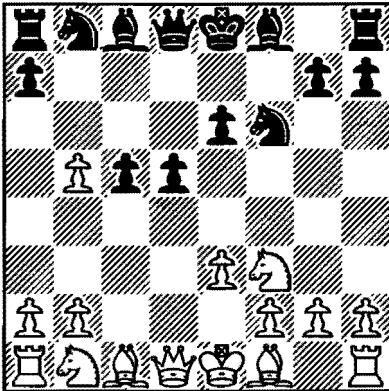
**A: 7 e3**

**B: 7 g3**

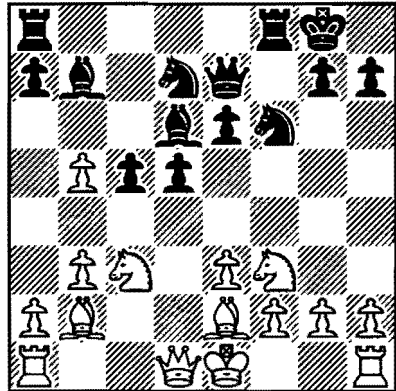
**C: 7 Bf4**

**D: 7 Bg5**

**A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 7 e3 (Diagram 14)**



**Diagram 14 (B)**



**Diagram 15 (W)**

I suspect that this is a popular choice amongst club players unfamiliar with the Blumenfeld. White frees his light-squared bishop and prevents Black's d-pawn from advancing in the near future. However, given that White will probably need to push through e4 if he is to trouble Black, I feel that the text is both a little slow and allows Black to arrange his ideal set-up.

**7...Bd6 8 Nc3**

White's logic might be that it is now safe to develop the knight here, although I've already mentioned why Black should beware playing 7...d4 after 7 Nc3. The alternative is to delay developing this piece or to deploy it on d2. Black is not going to be confused by waiting moves, though, as he has plenty of sensible developing moves of his own. Nevertheless, here are two other possibilities:

a) After 8 b3 0-0 9 Bb2 Nbd7 10 Nbd2 Bb7 11 Qc2 e5 I guess that White was reticent about employing the otherwise thematic e3-e4 with his king still in the centre, but 12 Nh4 Ng4!? led to complications not unfavourable for Black in Zhou Wei-Qi-Wang Hao, Shandong 2007.

b) Following 8 Nbd2 0-0 9 Qc2 Bb7 10 Bd3 c4 11 Be2 a6!? both 12 Nd4 and 12 e4 have turned out well for Black in practice.

## 8...0-0 9 Be2 Bb7 10 b3 Nbd7 11 Bb2 Qe7 (Diagram 15) 12 0-0

The last few moves have passed by without comment as it's not difficult to imagine white players playing such moves on autopilot. Actually regarding 7 e3, the amazing truth is that it seems as though not much has changed in 86 years of Blumenfeld Counter Gambit theory! The text rather walks into an attack, so more recently White tried 12 Qc2 e5 13 0-0-0. However, his highly-rated opponent showed that the king isn't safe on the queenside either: 13...d4 14 exd4 cxd4 15 Bc4+ Kh8 16 Ne2 Be4 17 Qd2 Nb6 18 Ng3 Nxc4 19 bxc4 Rac8 20 Nxe4 Rxc4+ 21 Kb1 Nxe4 22 Qd3 Nc3+ 23 Ka1 Rfc8 24 Nd2 Ra4 (Diagram 16) 25 Bxc3 Rxc3 26 Qe4 Qf7 27 Qb1 Rca3 and 0-1 was the crushing course of A.Postojev-P.Harikrishna, Mainz (rapid) 2006.

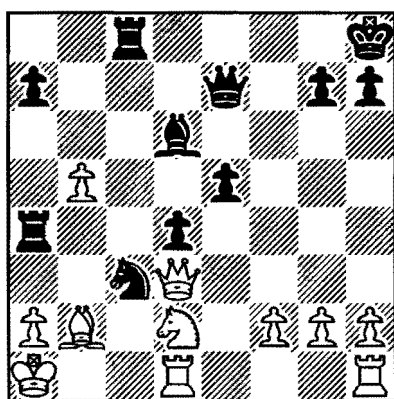


Diagram 16 (W)

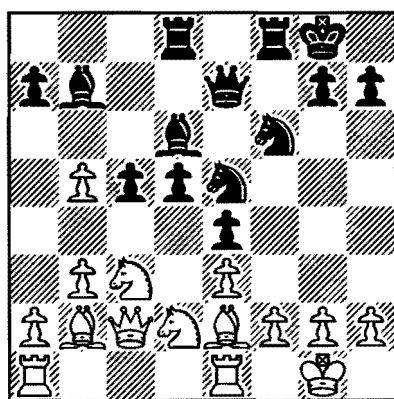


Diagram 17 (W)

12...Rad8 13 Qc2 e5 14 Rfe1



**BEWARE!** Black's main concern whenever he advances his e-pawn is whether White can respond favourably with 14 e4, as after 14...d4 15 Bc4+ White gains control of some light squares.



Here, though, White's e-pawn is in trouble and Black has everything under control: i.e. 15...Kh8 16 Nd5 Nxd5 17 exd5 e4 18 Rfe1 Rxf3! 19 gxf3 (or 19 Rxe4 Qg5) 19...Qg5+ 20 Kf1 (20 Kh1 Qf4) 20...exf3 with a strong attack.

### 14...e4 15 Nd2 Ne5 (Diagram 17)

Black has excellent compensation for the pawn. His knights are raring to descend on h2, and do make sure to play over the following game as it is a classic: 16 Nd1 Nfg4 17 Bxg4 Nxe4 18 Nf1 Qg5! 19 h3 Nh6 20 Kh1 Nf5 21 Nh2 d4! 22 Bc1 d3 23 Qc4+ Kh8 24 Bb2 Ng3+! 25 Kg1 Bd5 26 Qa4 Ne2+ 27 Kh1 Rf7 28 Qa6 h5 29 b6 Ng3+! 30 Kg1 axb6 31 Qxb6 d2 32 Rf1 Nxf1 33 Nxf1 Be6 34 Kh1 Bxh3! 35 gxh3 Rf3 36 Ng3 h4 37 Bf6 Qxf6 38 Nxe4 Rxh3+ and 0-1 was S.Tarrasch-A.Alekhine, Bad Pistyan 1922.

### B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 7 g3 (Diagram 18)

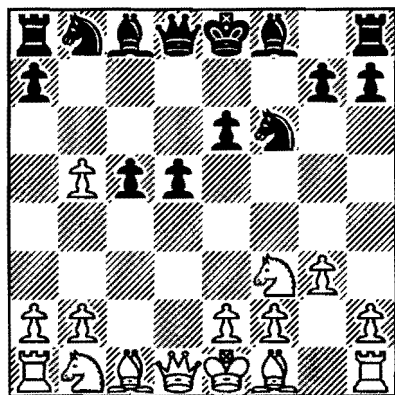


Diagram 18 (B)

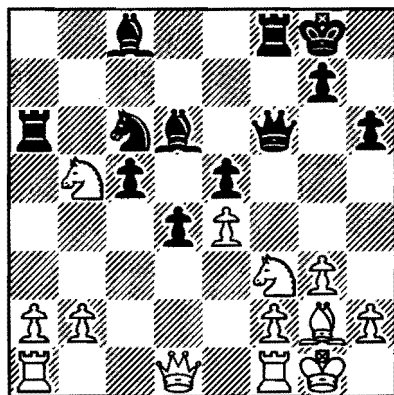


Diagram 19 (W)

There are obvious comparisons between this and our opening illustrative game. Here, though, White is happy to commit his bishop at once and it's worth noting that Black can't guarantee regaining his pawn with 7...Qa5+ 8 Nc3 d4, because of 9 Qa4!. However, such an approach isn't in the spirit of the opening anyway!

### 7...a6! 8 bxa6 Bd6

There is just something aesthetically pleasing about leaving that pawn on a6! Black can choose which piece to take it with later.

### 9 Bg2 0-0 10 0-0 Nc6

If Black does intend taking the a6-pawn with his bishop, that move and ...Nc6 are interchangeable. With the 10...Bxa6 move order, though, one entertaining encoun-

ter was 11 Re1 Nc6 12 Ng5 Qe7 13 e4 d4 14 e5 Nxe5 15 Bf4 Nfd7 16 Bxe5 Nxe5 17 f4 Rab8 18 b3 Bc7 19 Nxh7 Kxh7 20 fxe5 Kg8 21 Nd2 Rf5 22 Bh3 Rbf8 23 Bxf5 Rxf5 24 Qg4 Bb7 25 Rf1 Qd7 26 Rae1 Ba5 27 Ne4 Qc6 28 Rxf5 exf5 29 Nf6+ Kf7 30 Qh5+ Ke6 31 Re4 gxf6 32 Qg6 fxe4 33 Qxf6+ Kd7 and 0-1 in M.Vasilev-D.Rogozenko, Wijk aan Zee 2007. It should go without saying that as soon as White has opted to fianchetto and castle kingside, his light-squared bishop becomes a vital piece and he will be punished should he lose it.

## 11 Nbd2

Following 11 Nc3, no doubt many would quite happily opt to take on a6 with the bishop. Nevertheless, offering something different was 11...Rxa6 12 Bg5 h6 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 e4 d4 15 Nb5 e5 (**Diagram 19**), which saw Black advance in the centre in D.Rombaldoni-K.Landa, Reggio Emilia 2007.

## 11...Bxa6 12 Re1

White's only serious plan is to challenge with the standard e4 break. The text offers more support to that, as well as of course unpinning the e-pawn itself. That said, White could easily switch this and his next two moves around, while he must beware a black knight invading on the d3-square.

## 12...Qe8!

Against a non-fianchetto system the queen is often happy to simply bide its time on e7, possibly one day lining up with the dark-squared bishop against h2. Here, though, things are different and this queen manoeuvre is a very important one.

## 13 b3 Qh5 14 Bb2 (Diagram 20)

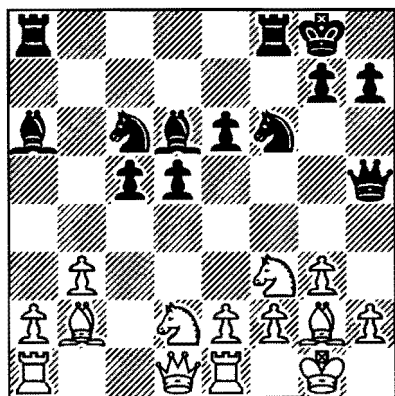


Diagram 20 (B)

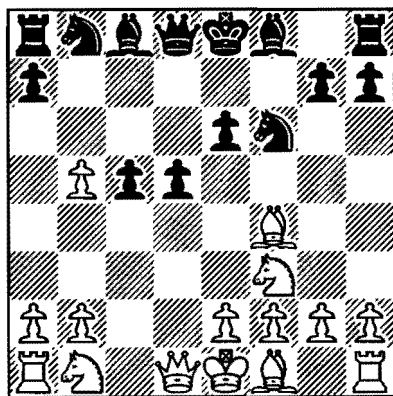


Diagram 21 (B)

Black has a fine centre and some useful half-open files to show for his pawn. Furthermore, he has serious chances for a kingside attack, as was demonstrated by

the following complicated but visual encounter: 14...Ng4!? 15 h3 Nxf2! 16 Kxf2 Nd4! 17 Bxd4 cxd4 18 Nf1 e5 19 Kg1 Bb4 20 Rc1 Qf5 21 Kh2 Qf6 22 Qc2 e4 23 N3d2 Qe5 24 Qc6 Bc3 25 e3 Rfc8 26 exd4 Bxd4 27 Qd7 Rd8 28 Qc7 Qf6 29 Nxe4 dxe4 30 Ne3 Bxe3 and 0-1 in M.Kuraszkiewicz-R.Wojtaszek, Warsaw (rapid) 2007. Incidentally, such a scenario is by no means uncommon; there have been a couple of other similar high-level black victories.

**C) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 7 Bf4 (Diagram 21)**

The logic behind this move is simple. White wants to play e3, but first develops his bishop and settles for further control over the e5-square.

**7...Bd6**

Again beware 7...Qa5+?! 8 Nc3 d4 9 Qa4!, but while 7...Be7 seems okay to me too, the appeal of the text is that Black challenges for the e5-square.

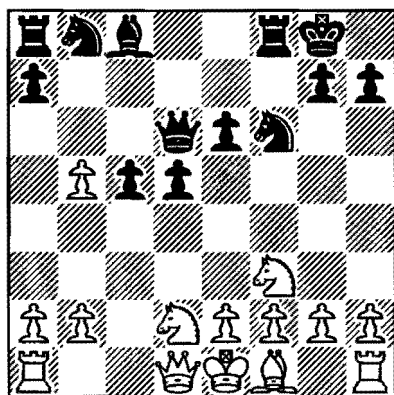
**8 Bxd6 Qxd6**

Now the black queen is very well placed, although it's worth noting that the d5-pawn is pinned and White may aim for Nd2-c4.

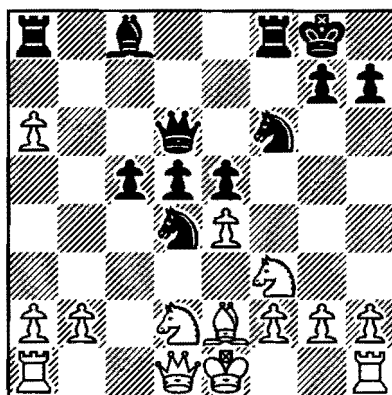
**9 Nbd2**

Instead 9 e3 allows Black to strike while the iron is hot with 9...e5, while 9 Nc3 0-0 10 e4 Nbd7 11 Bc4 Bb7 maintains Black's attractive centre.

**9...0-0 (Diagram 22)**



**Diagram 22 (W)**



**Diagram 23 (W)**

Now it's time for White to make a decision about his bishop.

**10 e3**

The alternative is 10 g3, but 10...a6!? 11 bxa6 Bxa6 12 Bg2 (similar is 12 Bh3 Nc6 13

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

0-0 e5) 12...Nc6 13 0-0 e5 leaves Black sitting pretty in the centre and he will look to squash White further with ...e4.

### 10...a6!?

Also plausible is 10...Nbd7 11 Be2 Ne5 (11...e5 is well met by 12 e4!) 12 Nxe5 Qxe5 13 Qc2 c4, although it is nice to keep the queen's knight flexible and the Benko-style a-pawn offering has proven to be quite a successful theme.

### 11 bxa6 Nc6 12 Be2 e5 13 e4 Nd4 (Diagram 23)

Black enjoys very reasonable play for what will soon be only one pawn.

### D) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 e6 3 Nf3 c5 4 d5 b5 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 cxb5 d5 7 Bg5

This time the bishop ventures one square further. Here it doesn't influence the e5-square, but it does pin the knight on f6 and so brings e2-e4 into the equation.

### 7...Be7

Unpinning the knight and thereby knocking any rapid e4 aspirations on the head. Note that the bishop can always later venture to d6 if needed.

### 8 e3 0-0 9 Bd3

Any vague threats against h7 are merely a smokescreen, and the fact is that White wants the bishop here to support e3-e4 at some stage. However, it is vulnerable to ...c4 ideas and clearly 9 Be2 is a more conservative alternative. Then something like 9...Nbd7 10 0-0 Bb7 11 Nc3 Qe8 (Diagram 24) makes sense.

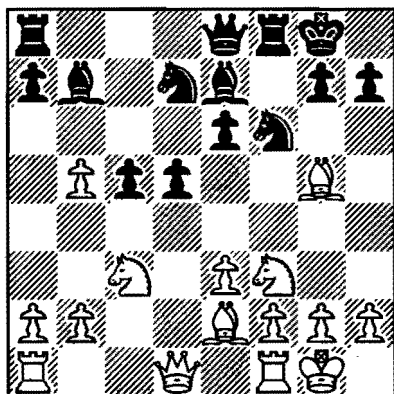


Diagram 24 (W)

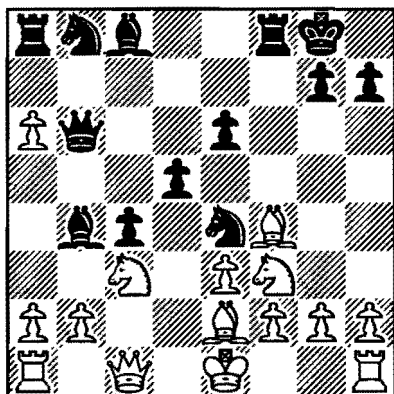


Diagram 25 (B)

Her majesty seeks to join in the action on g6 or h5, and Black had to be happy with 12 Bh4 Bd6 13 Bg3 Bxg3 14 hxg3 e5 in D.Glavas-M.Pap, Bajmok 2001, which concluded in entertaining style: 15 Nh4 e4 16 g4 Qe5 17 g3 Kh8 18 Kg2 g5 19 Nf5 Nb6

20 a4 Rad8 21 a5 Nc8 22 f4 exf3+ 23 Bxf3 Nxg4! 24 Bxg4 d4+ 25 Kh3 dxc3 26 Qc2 Rd2 27 Qxd2 cxd2 28 Nh6 Qd6 0-1.

### **9...a6!? 10 bxa6**

Upon 10 0-0?! c4 Black will soon have an even better structure and without being a pawn down!

### **10...c4 11 Be2 Qb6!**

Before White gets settled, Black takes advantage of the weak point on b2.

### **12 Qc1 Bb4+ 13 Nc3**

Given the threats against g5, d2 and f3, White would be practically lost after 13 Nbd2? Ne4, but of course the black knight is destined for that excellent post anyway.

### **13...Ne4 14 Bf4 (Diagram 25)**

Instead 14 0-0? Bxc3 15 bxc3 Rxf3 sees White lose two pieces for a rook, while 14 Bh4 Qa5 creates too much pressure against c3. The text at least facilitates the defensive Be5, but now it is the f2-square that White needs to worry about! Here Black could simply play 14...Nxf2, but 14...Rxf4!? isn't bad either. The game M.Vasilev-E.Miroshnichenko, Izmir 2006, continued 15 exf4 Qxf2+ 16 Kd1 Nxa6 17 Rf1 Qb6 18 Nxe4 dxe4 19 Ne5 Bb7 20 Nxc4 Qd4+ 21 Kc2 Rc8 22 Kb3 Bd5 23 Rd1 Nc5+ 24 Kxb4 Nd3+ 25 Bxd3 Rb8+ 26 Ka4 Bc6+ and 0-1.

## **Conclusion**

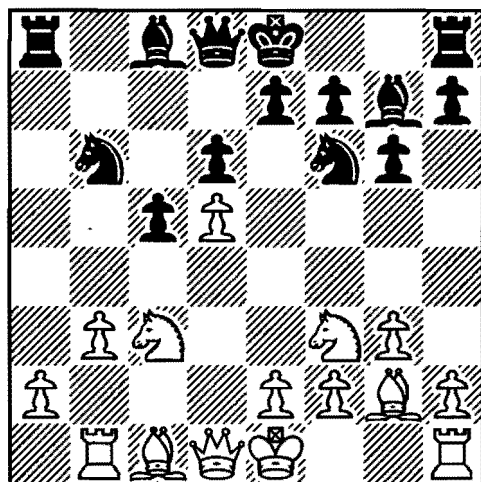
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I played the Blumenfeld Counter Gambit regularly as a junior before later branching out to the Modern Benoni when I was 'informed' that it isn't wise to concede a pawn so early! As the reader has seen in this chapter, I have been very prepared to return to it as an occasional weapon, but I must confess that writing this chapter has whetted my appetite for the opening completely. I guarantee you that a place will remain in my repertoire for this exciting pawn offering, which if accepted definitely offers Black reasonable compensation.

## Chapter Ten

# A Paradoxical Bishop Retreat

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 g3 d6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 Nf3 Nbd7 10 Rb1 Nb6 11 b3 Bc8!? (Diagram 1)**



**Diagram 1 (W)**

An early Rb1 in the Fianchetto Variation is currently the most fashionable way of challenging the Benko. Responding with 10...Nb6 11 b3 Bc8 looks very counterintuitive, but the idea becomes more logical the more you look at it. White does not

yet want to play e2-e4 as then Black plays his bishop back to a6, stopping White from castling, and e2-e4 also cedes the d3-square for Black to use. Meanwhile Black threatens 12...Bf5 when White does not have a good square for his rook (it will get in trouble if it moves to the long diagonal), and thus ...Bf5 needs to be stopped.

The Dutch GM Karel van der Weide is the main practitioner of this variation, having played it in no fewer than six games. Now the idea is spreading fast and I was certainly most impressed by Rune Djurhuus's energetic Benko display during a recent training match between England and Norway.

□ S.Gordon ■ R.Djurhuus

Oslo 2008

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 g3 d6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 Nf3 Nbd7 10 Rb1 Nb6 11 b3 Bc8!? 12 Nh4 h6**

Black renews the threat of ...Bf5 via ...g5, pushing the knight back.

**13 Qc2 Qd7 (Diagram 2)**

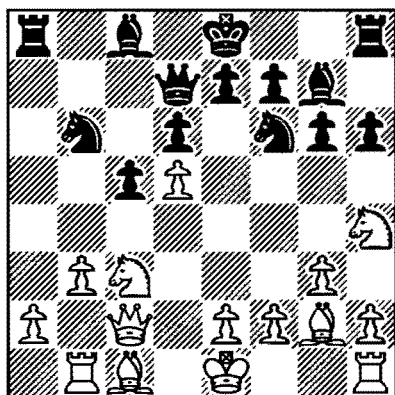


Diagram 2 (W)

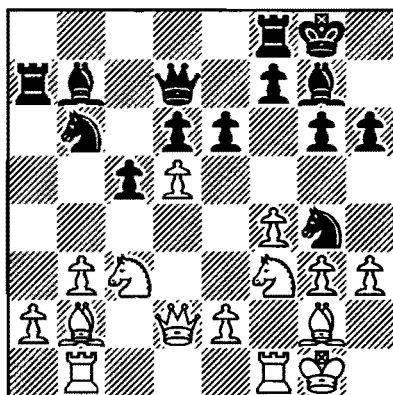


Diagram 3 (B)

And again ...g5 is the plan!

**14 f4!?**

Both sides take radical steps in a bid to attack and defend d5 respectively. We will cover both the misguided 14 e4?! and the prudent 14 Bb2 in the Looking a Little Deeper section, below.

**14...Bb7 15 e4**

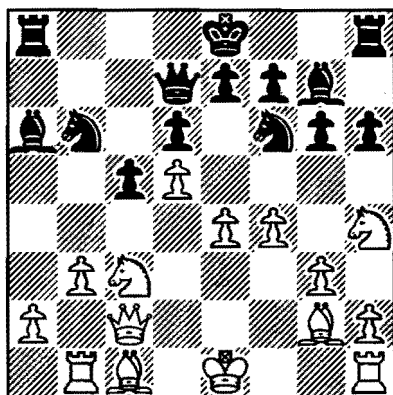
## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Instead 15 Bb2 0-0 16 Qd2 may be White's best try to keep an advantage. Indeed, 16...Ne8?! 17 0-0 Nc7 18 f5! gave White a strong set-up in A.Barsov-S.Mannion, Port Erin 2003, but Black does better with 16...Ra7!? and after 17 0-0 Ng4 18 Nf3 e6 19 h3 (**Diagram 3**) 19...Nf6, Black has succeeded in undermining the d5-pawn.

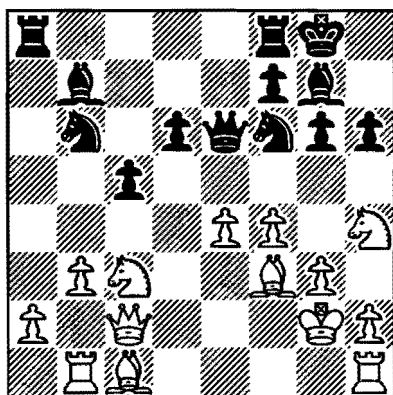


**ROLL THE DICE!** Another very interesting option here is 19...exd5! 20 hxg4 d4 21 Nd1 Rxa2, reaching a fascinating position in which Black's strong central pawns, more active pieces and the use of the outposts on e3, c3 and b4 compensate for the piece. I'm slightly sceptical whether Black definitely has enough compensation, but the position certainly looks fun to play!

15...Ba6 (**Diagram 4**)



**Diagram 4 (W)**



**Diagram 5 (W)**

Djurhuus completes his plan by finding a good role for his light-squared bishop which has now moved three times in the last five moves. Indeed, the last few moves may appear a little bizarre, but this position is far from clear. White might have seized some central space, but his knight is out of play on h4 and his king has been severely weakened by his pawn pushes, leaving Black looking to exploit the weakened d4-, d3- and e3-squares.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Analysing this game with Stephen Gordon, we came to the conclusion that the position is much easier for Black to play and that White has no advantage.



**16 Bf3**

White plans on bringing his king to safety on f2 or g2.

**16...0-0**

Black finally turns to the task of completing his development.

**17 Kf2 e6!**

Breaking open the centre while White's pieces are still disconnected, although 17...Qh3!?, with ideas of ...Ng4+, was also tempting.

**18 dxe6 Qxe6 19 Kg2**

After the greedy 19 e5? dxe5 20 Bxa8 Ng4+ 21 Kg2 Rxa8 White is the exchange up, but his light squares in particular look very exposed. Meanwhile Black's bishops are working very well together and his superior co-ordination leaves him clearly for preference. Indeed, *Fritz* already feels that Black is winning!

**19...Bb7 (Diagram 5)**

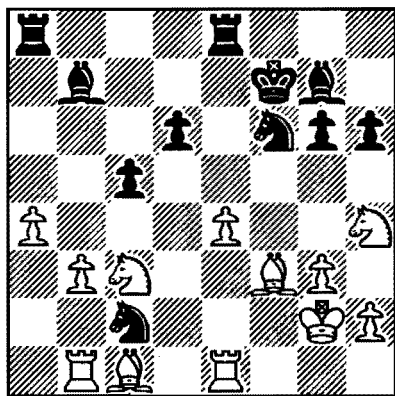
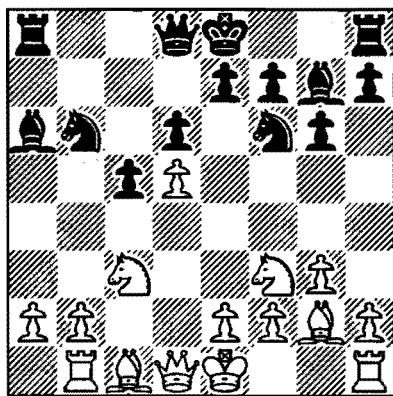
Now the target is the weak pawn on e4 and after 20 Re1 Nbd5 Black is able to exploit the pin down the e-file, just as he does in the game.

**20 a4 Rfe8 21 Re1 Nbd5! 22 f5**

Relatively best, whereas 22 Nxd5 Nxd5 23 f5 Nb4 would have given Black an improved version of the game.

**22...Nb4 23 fxe6?**

It was essential to grovel with 23 Qd1.

**23...Nxc2 24 exf7+ Kxf7 (Diagram 6)****Diagram 6 (W)****Diagram 7 (W)**

White has managed to swap the queens, but doing so has left him in even more

trouble. The pawn on e4 is doomed and his pieces remain rather scattered, leaving Black with some advantage.

### **25 Rf1 Nd4 26 b4 Nxf3?!**

In the post-mortem we came to the conclusion that White's position would be very difficult to hold after ...c4, either this move or the next. White's two connected passed pawns on the queenside are hardly enough compensation for both the various pins and the squares controlled by Black's two mighty bishops. The light squares in particular are going to cause White some concern, as shown by the sample line 26...c4! 27 Kg1 Kg8! 28 a5 (Black wins material after 28 Nxc6 Nxf3+ 29 Rxf3 Nxe4) 28...Nxf3+ 29 Nxf3 Nxe4, retaining a clear advantage.

### **27 Rxf3 cxb4?! 28 Rxb4 Bc6 29 Nd5 ½-½**

Here the players agreed a draw since White's last should lead to a drawn endgame, such as after 29...Rxe4 30 Rxe4 Bxd5 31 Rd4 Bxf3+ 32 Nxf3.

## Looking A Little Deeper

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### **1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 g3 d6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 Nf3 Nbd7 10 Rb1 Nb6 (Diagram 7) 11 b3**

The main move and one played far more often than the alternatives, although Epishin has dabbled in them:

a) 11 Nh4!? is one of Epishin's ideas, but Black achieves a fully playable position after 11...Nfd7 12 Qc2 Nc4 13 a3 Rb8 14 0-0 Qa5 when his activity on the queenside makes up for the sacrificed pawn.

b) A key point is that 11 0-0?! Bc4! regains the pawn and after 12 Nd2 Bxa2 13 Nxa2 Rxa2 14 Qb3 Ra8 15 Qb5+ Nfd7 16 b4 Na4! Black is for preference.

c) 11 a4 was in fact tried by Epishin against me a few years ago when he outrated me by a few hundred points! Following 11...Bc8!? (or 11...Bb7 12 e4 Ba6 13 Bf1 Nfd7 14 Nb5 c4 15 Be3 Bxb5 16 axb5 Na4!? 17 Qc2 Nxb2!? which reached an interesting position in V.Epishin-G.Jones, Deizisau 2003) 12 Nh4 h6 13 e4 Ba6 14 f4 0-0 15 Kf2 White is rather extended and 15...Nc4 16 Re1 Nd7 17 Nf3 Qb6 18 Qc2? Bd4+! left him in some trouble in D.Floor-R.Odendahl, Vlissingen 2005.

d) 11 Nd2 Bb7 12 Nf1 seems a rather artificial way of defending the d5-pawn: 12...0-0 (Black might also consider the more forcing 12...e6!? 13 Ne3 Nfxd5 14 Ncxd5 Nxd5 15 Nxd5 Bxd5 16 Bxd5 exd5 17 Qxd5 0-0 with decent queenside pressure) 13 Ne3 Ra6 14 0-0 Qa8 gave Black typical Benko counterplay against a2 and d5 in P.Amoyal-C.Navrotescu, French League 2002.

### **11...Bc8**

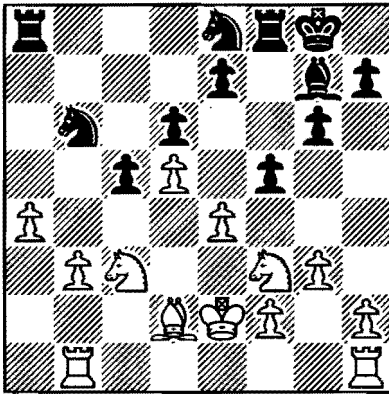
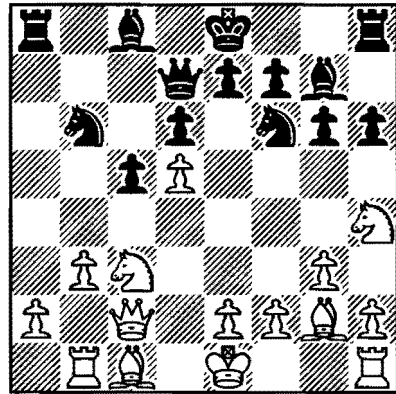
White must now decide how to counter the threat of 12...Bf5.

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**A: 12 Nh4**
**B: 12 Nd2**


---

Instead 12 e4 is probably the most logical move, but this falls in with Black's plans: 12...Ba6! 13 Bf1 Qc8!? (continuing to prevent White from castling) 14 Bd2 0-0 15 Bxa6 Qxa6 16 Qe2 Ne8 17 a4 Qxe2+! (a curious fact about the Benko, unlike most other gambits, is that Black does not fear going into an ending as his compensation does not normally decrease; this is because Black's compensation is largely positional and once the queens are swapped he can safely arrange an undermining ...f5-advance) 18 Kxe2 f5 (**Diagram 8**) 19 exf5 Bxc3 20 Bxc3 Nxd5 undermined White's centre and left Black slightly better in O.Cvitan-C.Matamoros Franco, Cannes 1996.

**Diagram 8 (W)****Diagram 9 (W)**

**A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 g3 d6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 Nf3 Nbd7 10 Rb1 Nb6 11 b3 Bc8 12 Nh4 h6 13 Qc2**

Prudent. White fights for the f5-square, whereas the inconsistent 13 0-0?! g5 14 Nf3 Bf5 15 Rb2 Ne4 16 Nxe4 Bxe4 17 Rd2 Bc3 18 Bb2 Bxb2 19 Rxb2 Nxd5 sees Black regain his pawn with the upper hand.

**13...Qd7 (Diagram 9)**

We now reach a further divide:

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**A1: 14 e4**
**A2: 14 Bb2**


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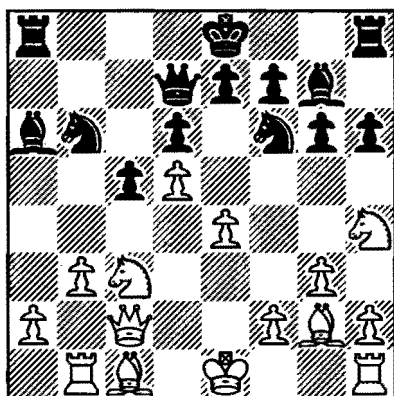
## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Line A1 has certain similarities with the earlier 12 e4, while White's slightly off-side knight on h4 balances out the weakening of Black's kingside with ...h6. Practice has also seen White return the pawn with 14 0-0 g5 15 Nf3, but after 15...Nfxd5 (Black might also delay this, preferring 15...Qf5!? as Van der Weide once did) 16 Nxd5 Nxd5 17 Bd2 Bb7 18 a4 (V.Epishin-S.Halkias, Ohrid 2001), I don't think that Black has anything to fear and he can calmly castle with the advantage: his two bishops cover more squares than White's, he controls the centre and can target White's queenside pawns.

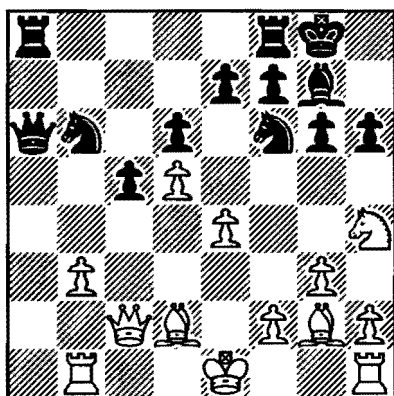
**A1) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 g3 d6 8 Bg2 Bg7 9 Nf3 Nbd7 10 Rb1 Nb6 11 b3 Bc8 12 Nh4 h6 13 Qc2 Qd7 14 e4?!**

This is slightly illogical, especially considering that White has been trying to avoid this advance over the last couple of moves. Now Black can keep White's king stuck in the centre for the indefinite future.

**14...Ba6 (Diagram 10)**



**Diagram 10 (W)**



**Diagram 11 (W)**

**15 a4**

A fairly typical move by White, but in this case it fails to achieve much. However, it is hard to suggest a good plan for him and, for example, 15 Bf1 fails to solve his problems after 15...Bxf1 16 Kxf1 Qh3+ 17 Ng2 0-0 18 Kg1 Nh5! when White is still playing without his rook on h1.

**15...0-0 16 Nb5?**

And this move is altogether faulty.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** The pressure has got to White who rather desperately returns the extra pawn, but doing so does not relieve the pressure as his king remains stuck in the centre. That said, against most other moves opening the centre with 16...e6 looks strong for Black.

### 16...Bxb5 17 axb5 Qxb5 18 Bd2

The alternative 18 Qe2 Qxe2+ 19 Kxe2 Ra2+ leaves Black with a clear advantage: White still hasn't finished his development and even if he does his worse pawn structure, in particular the weak f2-, e4- and b3-pawns, should decide the game in Black's favour. Note that 20 Rb2? allows the decisive tactic 20...Nfxd5! 21 Rxa2 Nc3+.

### 18...Qa6!? (Diagram 11)

I like this move. Black continues to prevent White from castling and also threatens to play ...Qa2, disrupting White's queenside.

### 19 Bc3

If 19 Bf1 Qa2 20 Bd3 Qxc2 21 Bxc2 Ra2 22 Bd3 Ng4 and White remains tangled.

### 19...Ng4

This attacks f2 in some lines and threatens to re-route the knight to d3 via e5. Black also welcomes a trade of the dark-squared bishops as this will leave White's king even more vulnerable in the centre.

### 20 Nf3 Qa2!

We've been following the game A.Kizov-G.Jones, Sydney 2008. Here Kizov thought for over 30 minutes, obviously disgusted with his position. I presume he calculated the forced lines after 21 Qxa2 and decided that he was losing: 21...Bxc3+ (21...Rxa2 22 Bxg7 Kxg7 23 0-0 f5 also looks strong) 22 Qd2 Bxd2+ 23 Nxd2 Ra2 24 Rd1 Rfa8 is the line I looked at during the game and decided that White's b3-pawn will drop off. A sample continuation might run 25 0-0 Rb2 26 h3 Nf6 27 f4 Raa2 28 Rf2 Nh5 29 Kh2 (or 29 g4 Nxf4!) 29...c4! 30 bxc4 Nxc4 and Black wins.

### 21 Rb2 Qa1+ 22 Kd2

22 Ke2 Qa6+ 23 Ke1 does not exactly inspire confidence for White and indeed after 23...Bxc3+ 24 Qxc3 Qb5 Black has an almost overwhelming advantage.

### 22...Bxc3+ 23 Qxc3 Qa3 (Diagram 12)

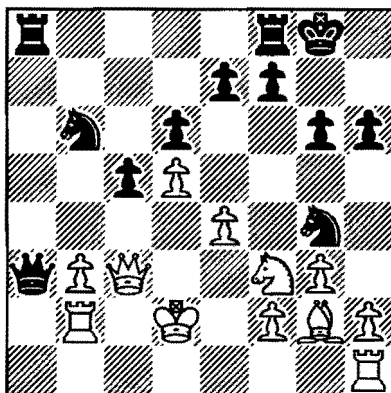
White's king will remain a target for the rest of the game and I went on to win without difficulty.

**A2) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 Nf3 d6 8 g3 Bg7 9 Bg2 Nbd7 10 Rb1 Nb6 11 b3 Bc8 12 Nh4 h6 13 Qc2 Qd7 14 Bb2**

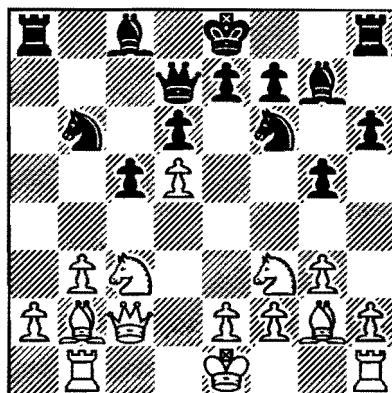
White simply develops and allows Black his ...g5-break.

**14...g5 15 Nf3 (Diagram 13) 15...Bb7**

Logically targeting the d5-pawn.



**Diagram 12 (W)**



**Diagram 13 (B)**



**ROLL THE DICE! 15...Qf5!?** is a tempting alternative. Black doesn't worry about regaining the pawn and instead tries for a quick kingside attack. Currently I think that White should manage to keep the advantage in this line, but it is certainly very interesting.

After 15...Qf5 practice has seen:

a) 16 e4 Qg6 17 0-0 0-0 (**Diagram 14**) 18 Qd2! (the most challenging: 18 Rfd1 Bg4 19 h3 Bxf3 20 Bxf3 h5 21 a4 g4 22 hxg4 hxg4 23 Bg2 Nfd7 gave Black decent counter-play in A.Breier-K.Van der Weide, Groningen 1999; and 18 Rbc1?! was seen in M.Bensdorp-K.Van der Weide, Wijk aan Zee 2006, but allows the tactic 18...Nxe4! 19 Nxe4 Rxa2! 20 Rb1 Rxb2 21 Rxb2 Bxb2 22 Qxb2 Qxe4 23 Nxc5 Qg6 when the weakness of d5 is more important than Black's lack of a g-pawn) 18...Ng4!? (Black wishes to open the f-file with a swift attack, whereas 18...Qh5?! 19 e5! Ng4 20 exd6 exd6 21 Rfe1 didn't convince in R.Kasimdzhanov-K.Van der Weide, Groningen 1999) 19 h3 (another accurate move since 19 Rfe1 f5 20 exf5 Bxf5 21 Ra1 Rf7 22 h3 Nf6 gave Black a decent, active set-up in M.Wunnink-E.Wiersma, Amsterdam 2002) 19...Ne5 20 Nxe5 Bxe5 21 Na4 Nxa4 (21...Nd7!?) 22 Bxe5 dxe5 23 bxa4 Rxa4 24 Qc2 Ra5 and White was a little better, but Black held the draw in F.Peralta-M.Leon Hoyos, Cali 2007.

b) 16 Qd1!? 0-0 17 0-0 Qg6! (dropping the queen back so that it will not be hit by e2-e4; note that the d-pawn is inedible due to the powerful g2-bishop, as shown

by, for example, 17...Nbxd5? 18 Nxd5 Nxd5 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 e4! – Tisdall) 18 a4 Bf5 (Black might also regain the pawn with 18...Bb7) 19 Rc1 was seen in V.Epishin-R.Piantoni, Bratto 2002, and now Black should consider both 19...Ne4!? and 19...Rfb8 with typical Benko compensation for the pawn.

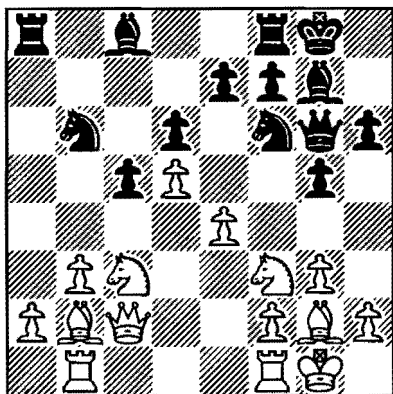


Diagram 14 (W)

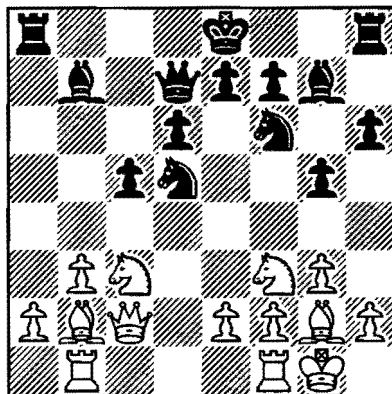


Diagram 15 (W)

Returning to the less exciting, but objectively stronger 15...Bb7:

**16 0-0!**

Probably not the best move, but after the 16 e4 Ba6 17 h4 g4 18 Nd2 0-0 of A.Ushenina-B.Tindall, Pardubice 2006, Black will try to break with ...e6 while White's king is still stuck in the centre. In J.Gustafsson-S.Kasparov, Deizisau 2002, 16 Rd1 was preferred, but after 16...0-0 17 0-0 Nfxd5 18 Nxd5 Nxd5 19 Bxg7 Kxg7 20 Nxd5 Black should have played 20...Nf6! 21 Bxb7 (Black's position is also okay after 21 Nf3 Be4 22 Qb2 Ra7, preparing to double against a2) 21...Qxb7 22 Nf3 Qe4 with good compensation for the pawn due to Black's active queenside play and central majority.

**16...Nbxd5! (Diagram 15)**

Black regains the pawn and stands slightly better.

**17 Nxd5 Bxd5 18 Bxf6**

A sad move to have to play, but 18 a4 allows 18...Be4, while 18 Ra1 Qb7 sees Black's active pieces give him the advantage.

**18...Bxf6 19 e4 Bc6**

Now if Black can castle he will stand better with his two bishops. Thus in G.Van der Stricht-W.Van den Brande, Ghent 2007, White tried to muddy the waters, but even 20 e5!? dxe5 21 Qxc5 Qb7! 22 Nh4 Bxg2 23 Nxg2 Rxa2 (Diagram 16) failed to give him enough for the pawn.

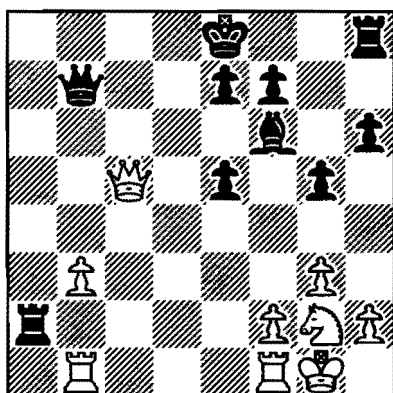


Diagram 16 (W)

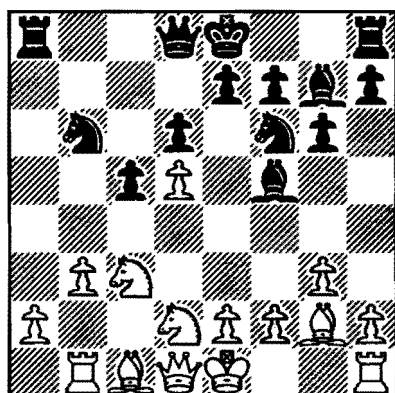


Diagram 17 (W)

**B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 Nf3 d6 8 g3 Nbd7 9 Bg2 Bg7 10 Rb1 Nb6 11 b3 Bc8 12 Nd2 Bf5! (Diagram 17)**

Black takes his plan to a new extreme, forcing White to play e2-e4 after all.

**13 e4 Bc8 14 0-0**

Avoiding having the king stranded in the centre, although practice has also seen:

a) 14 a4 0-0 (14...Ba6!?) 15 Nb5 (Black regains the pawn with advantage in the case of 15 0-0?! Ba6 16 Re1 Bd3 17 Ra1 Nfxd5!) 15...Ba6 16 Bf1 (White too can re-route his light-squared bishop!) 16...e6 17 dxe6 fxe6 18 Bh3 Re8 19 0-0 Qd7 20 Bb2 Bxb5 21 axb5 Qxb5 regained the pawn with equality in S.Agdestein-R.Djurhuus, Norwegian Championship, Moss 2006.

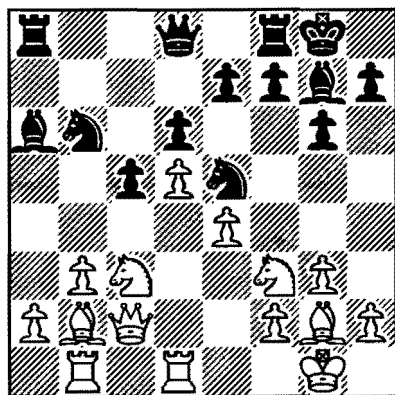
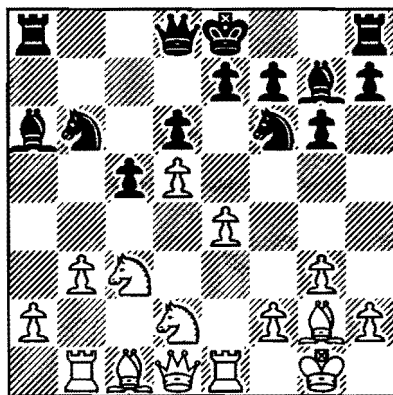
b) 14 Bb2 Nfd7 (Black might also consider 14...Ba6 15 Bf1 0-0 16 Bxa6 Rxa6 17 0-0 Qd7 with some compensation for the pawn, but not here 15...Qc8?! 16 Bxa6 Qxa6 17 Qe2! Qxe2+ 18 Kxe2 when White covers the important e4- and c4-squares) 15 Qc2 0-0 (once again 15...Ba6!? deserves serious attention and after 16 Bf1 Bxf1 17 Kxf1 0-0 18 Kg2, Black should consider both undermining breaks, 18...e6!? and 18...f5!?) 16 0-0 Ba6 17 Rfd1 Ne5 18 Nf3 (**Diagram 18**) 18...Nbd7 (Fritz gives the intriguing line: 18...Nxf3+ 19 Bxf3 e5!? 20 Bg2 f5, transforming the game into more of a Kings Indian-type position) 19 a4 and by this point White was a little better in A.Aleksandrov-E.Safarli, Abu Dhabi 2007.

**14...Ba6**



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** That bishop is back again! Black's last four moves have been ...Ba6-c8-f5-c8-a6, but it is by no means clear that White's last four moves have been so helpful and now Black can use the juicy d3-square.



**15 Re1 (Diagram 19)****Diagram 18 (B)****Diagram 19 (B)**

Now 15...Nfd7?! 16 Bb2 0-0 17 Nf3! (the knight is much better on f3, controlling the e5-square and allowing the queen to protect d3) 17...Ne5 18 Nxe5 Bxe5 19 Qd2 Nd7 20 Nd1 saw White consolidate his advantage in E.Bacrot-M.Carlsen, Rishon le Zion (blitz) 2007. However, in a longer game I'm sure Magnus would have played the logical 15...Bd3!, forcing White's pieces to awkward squares. Play might continue 16 Rb2 Nfd7 17 Ndb1 Bxb1 18 Qd2!? (the bishop is trapped; White can prefer to offer an exchange, but the position isn't at all clear after 18 Nxb1 Bxb2 19 Bxb2 0-0) 18...Bxa2 19 Rxa2 0-0 when Black has regained his pawn and stands well.

## Conclusion

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Black's idea of 11...Bc8 seems to be a successful counter to White's 7 g3 and 10 Rb1 plan which hitherto has been fairly successful. This paradoxical move, which was first played back in 1996 as far as I can find, has been given respectability with no lesser player than Magnus Carlsen adopting it successfully.

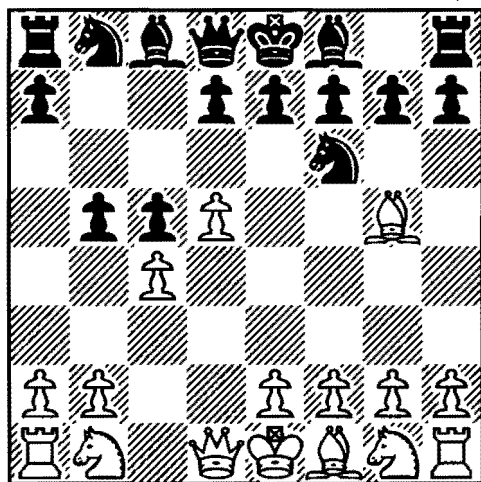
White's two critical moves are 12 Nd2, which leads to a typical Benko-type position in which Black has adequate compensation, and 12 Nh4 which can lead to interesting tactical positions. More specifically, in Line A2 Black has a pleasant choice between the highly unclear 15...Qf5 and the sounder 15...Bb7. I believe that there is still a lot to be discovered in this variation, but I have full confidence in Black's resources. Indeed, I recently employed it against Kizov to win a crucial last-round game and thereby tie for first in the Sydney Open.

## Chapter Eleven

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# Tromping the Benko

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5!? (Diagram 1)**



**Diagram 1 (B)**

The Benko is not an easy opening to surprise. Black is ready to reel out his standard moves after 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6, and White's enterprising 4th- and 5th-move deviations have by and large been defanged. However, perhaps the Trompowsky-

like 4 Bg5 might just do the trick: White takes Black away from his usual structures and the position can quickly become quite complex, not least after 4...g6 5 d6!.

Black's most principled response is 4...Ne4, but after 5 Bf4 Qa5+ 6 Nd2 he can easily find himself pushed backwards in the centre unless he undertakes radical measures (6...g5!? is not a move a player unfamiliar with this variation is likely to risk). Thus 4 Bg5 is not all about creating chaos; White can also hope to emerge from the opening with a small but clear edge. Furthermore, 4 Bg5 is pretty rare these days: I've found fewer than 200 games with it (quite a low number in this data-laden modern era), despite its having been used by such free thinkers as Tukmakov in the seventies and Miles in the eighties.

□ A.Miles ■ J.Bellon Lopez

Surakarta 1982

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5!? g6

The most common and critical choice is 4...Ne4, as we will see, but what happens if Black, shocked by 4 Bg5, just wants to solidly complete his development without undertaking anything too risky? That's a scenario which is very plausible, but unfortunately for Black his attempt to carry out the standard kingside fianchetto is actually rather risky in view of Miles's strong riposte.

5 d6! (Diagram 2)

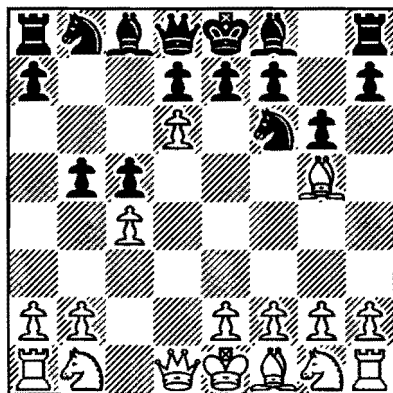


Diagram 2 (B)

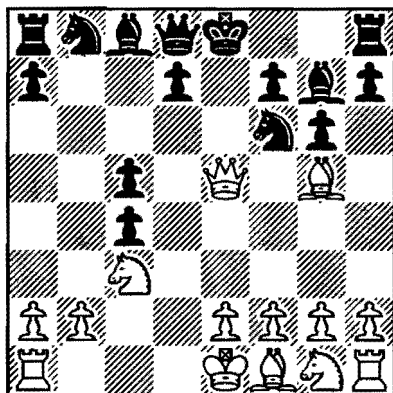


Diagram 3 (B)

Blowing open the position and preparing to saddle Black with numerous pawn weaknesses. Quieter souls might prefer the slower alternative 5 Nd2 Bg7 6 e4 d6 7

Ngf3, but after witnessing Miles's play, I predict that few readers will be able to reject the critical and strong text.

## 5...Bb7

Bellon Lopez ignores the pawn, preferring to get on with development. The position he soon reaches is not inspiring for Black, but neither is 5...exd6 6 Nc3 Bg7?! (Skembris once suggested that Black could get away with 6...a6? 7 Ne4 Qa5+, but he must have overlooked that 8 Bd2 Qd8 9 Nxf6+ Qxf6 10 Bc3 picks up a whole rook!; however, the sensible 6...Be7 is a better try and was played, according to ChessBase at least, in no lesser game than E.Grivas-S.Lputian, Athens 1983, in which White was only a little better after 7 Nxb5 0-0 8 Nf3 Bb7 9 Nxd6 Bxf3 10 gxf3 Qb6 11 Qd2 Nc6 12 Bg2 Rab8 13 Rb1 Qa6 14 b3) 7 Qxd6! (simple and strong, albeit untested; Skembris's *Informant* notes claim that 6...Bg7 was the actual move order of Grivas-Lputian, and after 7 Nxb5 0-0 8 Nf3 Bb7 9 Nxd6 Bxf3 10 gxf3 Qb6 11 Qd2 Nc6 12 Bg2 Rab8 13 Rb1 Qa6 14 b3 White was again only a little better) 7...bxc4 (Black lacks a good way of dealing with the check on a5; perhaps he might prophylactically cover the c7-square with 7...Na6!?, but after 8 cxb5 Nc7 9 Nf3 Ne6 10 Bh4 Bb7 11 0-0-0 White retains the upper hand due to his d-file grip) 8 Qe5+ (Diagram 3) 8...Kf8 (8...Qe7? 9 Qxe7+ Kxe7 10 Nd5+ Ke6 11 Nc7+ picks up the exchange for insufficient compensation) 9 Qxc5+ Kg8 10 e4 with a pleasant plus.

Probably 5...bxc4!? is a better try, as we will explore, along with 5...e6, in Line A of the Looking a Little Deeper section, below.

## 6 Nc3 a6?!

Slow. This was Black's last chance to take play into Line A, below, with 6...bxc4, transposing to a position that can also arise after 5...bxc4.

## 7 Bxf6! exf6 8 Qd2 (Diagram 4)

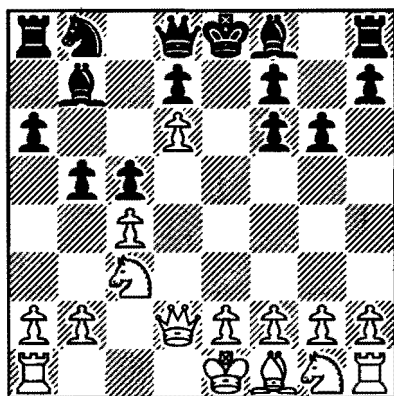


Diagram 4 (B)

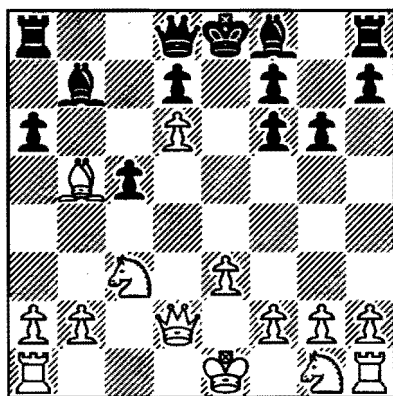


Diagram 5 (B)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** This is hardly the simple-to-play position Black was probably hoping for when he went 4...g6. The pawn on d6 is a massive thorn in Black's side and by giving up the bishop-pair, White has created the threat of 9 Qe3+.

### 8...Nc6!?

An enterprising attempt to sharpen the struggle. No doubt Bellon Lopez didn't like the look of the position after 8...Bg7 9 Qe3+ Kf8 10 Qxc5. I can quite understand why and while ...f5 will supply some counterplay, White's extra pawn and safer king ensure that he retains the upper hand after, say, 10...bxc4 11 Nf3 f5 12 e3 Nc6 13 Bxc4.

### 9 cxb5!?

Miles has a deep and dangerous exchange sacrifice in mind, but it was also possible to retain some advantage by playing more simply with 9 Nf3.

### 9...Nd4 10 e3 Nxb5 11 Bxb5 (Diagram 5) 11...axb5

The point of White's play was that 11...Bxg2!? 12 Bc4 Bxh1 13 f3 traps Black's bishop, leaving White in full control of the position, not to mention the option of rounding up the errant bishop. However, I feel that this was a better try for Black who at least could have hoped to drum up some counterplay on the dark squares and the queenside. Play might have continued 13...Bg7 14 0-0-0 (not 14 Kf2? due to 14...f5, followed by ...Qh4+, but White can also consider 14 Bd5!? Rb8 15 Nge2 0-0 16 0-0-0 Bxf3 17 Bxf3) 14...0-0 15 Qf2 Qb6 16 Nge2 Qb4 17 b3 f5 18 Kc2 when White appears to be able to maintain control on the queenside, but does face a more challenging technical task than in the game.

### 12 Nxb5 Qa5 13 Nc7+ Kd8 14 Nxa8 Qxd2+ 15 Kxd2 Bxg2 (Diagram 6)

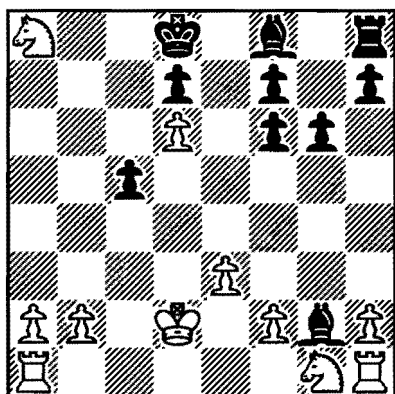


Diagram 6 (W)

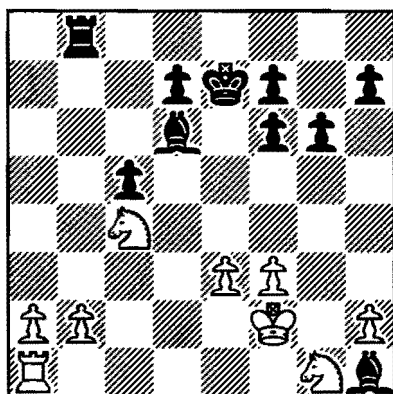


Diagram 7 (B)

### 16 f3?

After such a creative effort it is understandable that Miles continues in the same vein, but this optimistic move is a bit too flashy. Better was the calm 16 Ne2 Bxa8 17 Rhg1 Bxd6 18 f4 when Black's bishops are annoying, but White ought to be able to consolidate and put his extra exchange to good use.

### 16...Bxh1 17 Ke2 Bxd6?

Returning the favour. As later pointed out by Miles, matters would have been somewhat less clear had Black found 17...g5! when anything might have happened after 18 Rd1 (18 Nh3? g4 19 Rxh1 gxh3 leaves White in trouble on h2) 18...g4 19 b4!? Rg8 (White's idea is that 19...cxb4? 20 Nb6 Rg8? 21 Rc1 creates a crushing mate threat) 20 bxc5 Rg5 with a very unclear mess.

### 18 Kf2 Ke7 19 Nb6 Rb8 20 Nc4 (Diagram 7)

Having extricated his knight, White is back on track and can now turn his attention to picking up the cornered bishop.

### 20...Bxh2 21 e4!

Precise, whereas 21 Ne2?! Bxf3 22 Kxf3 d5 would have given Black unnecessary counterplay.

### 21...f5 22 Nh3 Bxf3 23 Kxf3 g5!?

Rather radical, but it's not clear that there was anything better since 23...fxe4+ 24 Kxe4 leaves Black unable to prevent White's king from reaching d5. Note how Miles doesn't hurry with his a-pawn, preferring to first co-ordinate his forces after which he will be able to target not just the black pawns, but also the black king.

### 24 Nxg5 h6 25 Nh3 fxe4+ 26 Kxe4 Ke6 27 Re1! d5+ 28 Kf3+ Kd7 29 Re2 (Diagram 8)

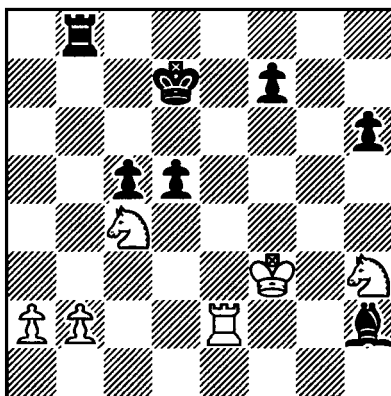


Diagram 8 (B)

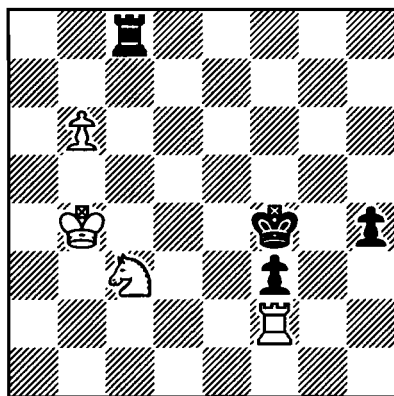


Diagram 9 (W)

### 29...dxc4?

Now Miles is left with the simple task of picking off Black's weak pawns. The last chance to resist was 29...Bc7.

**30 Rxh2 Ra8 31 Nf2! Rxa2 32 Ne4 Ke7 33 Kf4 Ra6 34 Ke5 Rg6 35 Kd5 f5 36 Nc3 Kf6 37 Kxc5 f4 38 Kxc4 Kf5 39 b4 f3 40 Rf2?!**

Black might have two passed pawns, but White's b-pawn is much too fast, and here the direct 40 b5! Kg4 41 Kc5 Kg3 42 Rb2 would have been the simplest win.

### 40...Kf4 41 b5 h5 42 Kc5 Rg8

Another tricky idea was 42...Rg2!?, although after 43 Nd1 h4 44 b6 h3 45 b7 Rg8 46 Kc6 Kg3 47 Rb2 h2 48 Nf2 White maintains his blockade and wins trivially.

### 43 b6 Rc8+ 44 Kb4 h4 (Diagram 9) 45 Rb2

Good enough and so too was 45 Rc2!?. Then White gains a tempo and wins after 45...Rb8 46 Kb5 h3 47 Rf2! Kg3 48 Ne4+ Kf4 49 Nd2 Kg3 50 Rxf3+ Kg2 51 Rf7 h2 52 Rg7+ Kf2 53 Ne4+ Kf3 54 Ng3.

### 45...Rd8?!

Not exactly the best try and one has to assume that the players hadn't adjourned at move 40. Instead 45...h3 would have hoped for the neat trick 46 Nd1? Rb8 47 Kc5 Kg3 48 b7 h2 49 Nf2 Rxb7! 50 Nh1+ Kh3 51 Rxb7 Kg2 when White's extra rook and knight are unable to prevent Black from queening one of his pawns with a draw. Likewise White should avoid 46 b7? Rb8 47 Kc5 h2, but the precise 46 Ka4! Rb8 47 Ka5 wins since Black is unable to advance either of his pawns.

### 46 b7 h3 47 Kc5 Kg4 48 Ne4 1-0

As 4...g6 5 d6 only seems to invite trouble, it's no surprise that the principled 4...Ne4 is by far Black's main choice. However, even here he is not promised an easy ride as we will now see in the company of Efstratios Grivas. The Greek GM has made good use of 4 Bg5 throughout his career (+6 =3 -1 from the games I could find), and is its leading practitioner along with the Hungarian IMs Evarth Kahn and Laszlo Zsinka.

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☐ E.Grivas ☒ L.Koerholz

European Club Cup, Rethymnon 2003

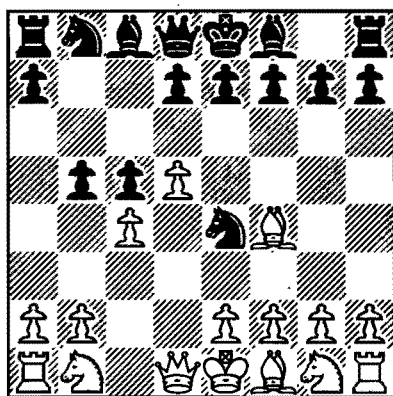
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### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 Ne4 5 Bf4 (Diagram 10) 5...d6

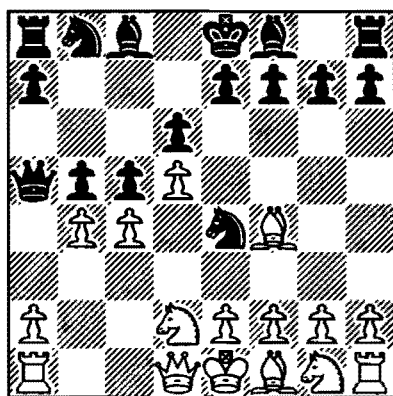
More usual, as we will see below, is to check immediately and after 5...Qa5+ 6 Nd2 Black has both 6...g5! and 6...bxc4, as well as 6...d6 when 7 f3 transposes to our main game.



**ROLL THE DICE!** White can also consider meeting 6...d6 with the somewhat more ambitious 7 b4!? (Diagram 11), which is a radical try to seize the initiative.



**Diagram 10 (B)**



**Diagram 11 (B)**

Following 7...Qxb4 8 Rb1 Qc3 9 Rxb5 Black must tread carefully. Probably he should try 9...Na6!? when 10...Nb4 is an annoying threat, and it's not clear that White has anything objectively better than repeating moves with 10 Rb3 Qa5 11 Rb5, since 10 f3 g5 11 Rb3 Qa5 12 Be3 Nc3 13 Qc1 Bg7 14 Bxg5 Nxa2 supplies decent counterplay. However, in practice Black has preferred the greedy 9...Nxd2 10 Bxd2 Qxc4 and after 11 e3?! (too ambitious; White should prefer 11 Qb1! Nd7 12 e4 which maintains good compensation) 11...Qxa2?! (the wrong pawn; instead 11...Qxd5 12 Be2 Bd7! doesn't wholly convince for White) 12 Bc3 e6 13 Bd3 Bd7 14 dxe6 Qxe6 15 Ne2 White's lead in development gave him excellent compensation for the pawns in A.Shashin-V.Dommes, USSR 1971, and he soon enjoyed a monstrous initiative after 15...d5 16 Nf4 Qd6 17 0-0! d4 18 exd4! Qxf4 19 Re1+ Be7 20 Rxc5.

### **6 f3 (Diagram 12)**

The most forcing continuation, although a case can also be made for both 6 Qc2 and the rare 6 Nd2!?. After the latter, 6...Nxd2 7 Bxd2 bxc4 (opening the b-file; another reasonable option is 7...b4 when 8 e4 g6 9 h4!? h5 10 Qc2 Bg7 11 Nf3 Nd7 12 Be2 gave White ideas of Ng5 followed by f4 in V.Parginos-Z.Iordanidou, Athens 2007) 8 e4 Nd7 9 Qa4 Qb6 10 Rb1 Ba6 11 Bxc4 Bxc4 12 Qxc4 Rb8 13 Nf3 was prematurely agreed drawn in A.Groszpeter-R.Vaganian, Copenhagen 1988, especially since White may have an edge here: 13...Qb5 (or 13...g6 14 Bc3) 14 Qxb5 Rxb5 15 Ke2 g6 16 b4! and the queenside is opening faster than Black would like.



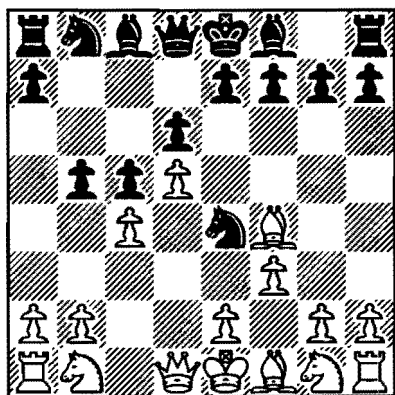


Diagram 12 (B)

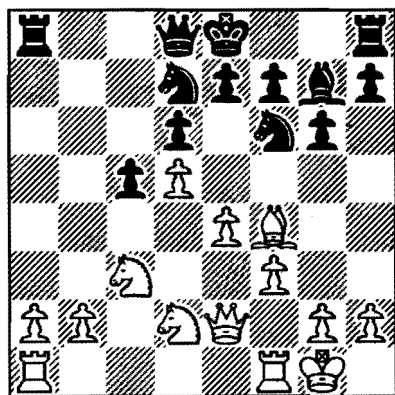


Diagram 13 (B)

**6...Qa5+**

Black doesn't have to flick the check in, but after 6...Nf6 7 e4 White should be fairly happy with his Sämisch-like centre. A couple of examples: 7...Nbd7 (or 7...bxc4 8 Bxc4 g6 9 Ne2! Bg7 10 Nec3 0-0 11 0-0 Ba6 12 Na3 Nfd7 13 Qe2 Qc8 14 Rac1 Ne5 15 b3!? Nxc4 16 bxc4 Nd7 17 Nab5 Ne5 18 Bg5 and the plan of advancing with f3-f4 left White slightly for choice in L.Zsinka-Z.Velickovic, Ptuj 1993) 8 cxb5 g6 9 Ne2 (again note this important idea: White would like his knights on c3 and c4, from where they both support his centre and hinder Black's counterplay) 9...a6 10 Nec3 Bg7 11 Nd2 axb5 12 Bxb5 Ba6 13 Bxa6 Rxa6 14 Qe2 Ra8 15 0-0 (**Diagram 13**) 15...0-0 16 Be3 Qb8 17 Rab1 Rc8 18 f4 was promising for White in W.Reichenbach-K.Bjerring, Hindas 1975. Here we can see that Black's counterplay is quite slow compared with the main line Benko, partly because White's control of the key c4-square hinders the standard idea of ...c4 and ...Nc5.

**7 Nd2 Nf6**

Black might also exchange knights, but 7...Nxd2 8 Bxd2 Qb6 looks a little slow for him and the energetic 9 cxb5 (there's also the no less aggressive 9 e4 b4 10 f4!?, and after 10...g6 11 Nf3 Bg7 12 Rb1 0-0 13 Bd3 e6 14 0-0 White enjoyed the standard attacking mechanism of Qe1-h4 in S.Hilton-M.Chojnowski, European Blind Championship, Durham 2007) 9...a6 10 a4! axb5 11 axb5 Rxa1 12 Qxa1 (**Diagram 14**) 12...Bd7 (or 12...Qxb5 13 e4 Qb3 14 Qa3!? Qxa3 15 bxa3 and the outside passed pawn should prove quite useful) 13 e4 Bxb5 14 Bxb5+ Qxb5 15 Qa7 e5 16 Ne2 gave White the initiative in the stem game for 4 Bg5, A.Csulits-K.Litkiewicz, Annaberg-Buchholz 1965.

**8 e4 bxc4 (Diagram 15)**

As Black has employed a number of alternatives at this juncture, we will have to return it (see Line E2, below).

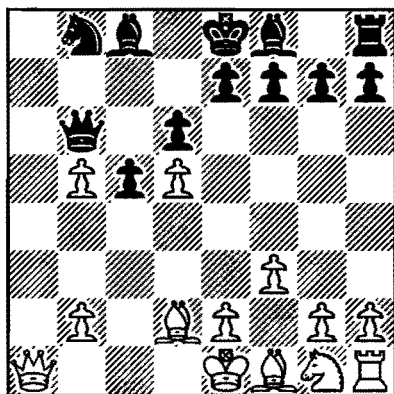


Diagram 14 (B)

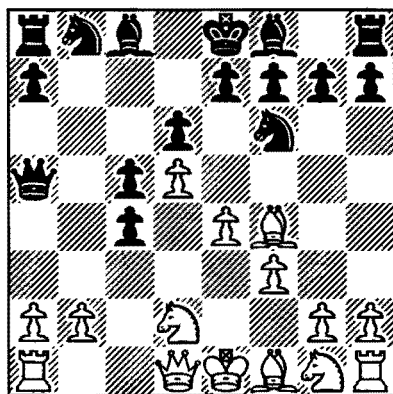


Diagram 15 (W)

## 9 Bxc4

Another promising option is 9 Ne2!?, keeping open the possibility of recapturing on c4 with the d2-knight:

a) 9...g6 10 Nc3 Bg7 11 Nxc4 Qd8 12 Be2 0-0 13 0-0 Nbd7 14 Qd2 saw White realize his aim in L.Zsinka-K.Olsson, Budapest 1993, before the thematic advance 14...Ba6 15 e5! dxe5 16 Nxe5 Nxe5 17 Bxe5 Bb7 18 Rad1 left him with a pleasant advantage.

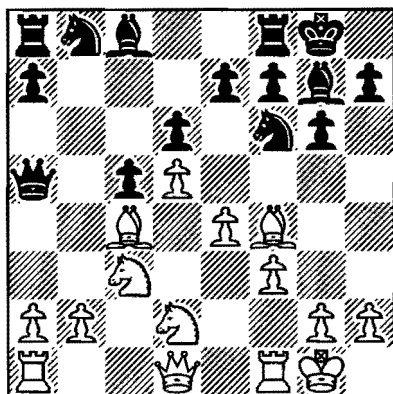
b) 9...Ba6 10 Nc3 Qb4?! is a critical but overly greedy attempt to interfere with White's plan. Following the powerful 11 Rb1 Nh5 12 a3 Qb7 13 Be3 g6 14 e5! dxe5 15 Nde4! Nd7 16 Qa4 Black must have been regretting his early ambition in J.Bellon Lopez-A.Martin, Benidorm 1982. Evidently Bellon Lopez didn't take long to join the bandwagon after his crushing defeat at the hands of Miles!

c) 9...Nh5 10 Be3 Nd7 11 Nc3 Ne5 12 Nxc4 Nxc4 13 Bxc4 Rb8 14 Qe2 g6 15 0-0 Bg7 16 Rac1 0-0 was seen in C.Santos-J.Ortega Ruiz, Linares 1997, and now 17 f4 looks like the most logical way to preserve a small pull.

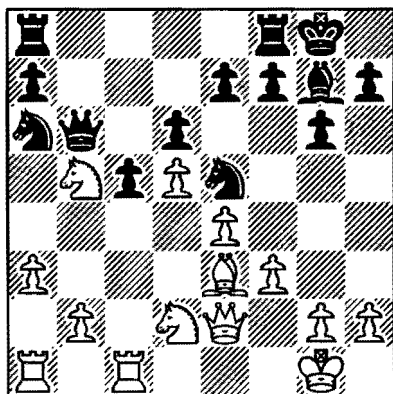
## 9...g6

In the game F.Gertsch-E.Trigance, correspondence 1992, Black delayed this standard fianchetto, preferring to fight for the c4-square. However, after 9...Nbd7 10 Ne2 Nh5!? 11 Be3 Ne5 12 0-0 Ba6, White could have given up on the c4-square and put his lead in development to good use with 13 Nb3! Qb6 14 Bxa6 Qxa6 15 f4 Nc4 (the forthcoming pin is awkward, but Black lacks a good follow-up after 15...Ng4 16 Bd2) 16 Qd3 Qa4 17 Nc3 Qb4 18 e5! when Black would have been in severe danger of being swiftly blown away.

**10 Ne2 Bg7 11 Nc3 0-0 12 0-0 (Diagram 16)**



**Diagram 16 (B)**



**Diagram 17 (B)**

This position has certain similarities with the Modern Benoni, as well as with other variations of the Benko, especially 4 Nf3 and 4 Nd2. White's strong centre gives him a pleasant grip in that part of the board, while Black is slightly behind in development and lacks immediate counterplay.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON:** In conclusion: White has emerged from the opening with a small but clear plus.

**12...Ba6**

It was again possible to challenge for the c4-square with 12...Nbd7!? 13 Qe2 Nb6 when at least White would be unable to play on the queenside in the manner that he does in the game.

**13 Qe2 Nfd7 14 Rfc1!?**

A creative idea. Rather than prepare to roll the centre pawns with 14 Bg5, which is more ambitious and would probably have been my choice, Grivas prefers to calmly manoeuvre on the queenside, aiming to gradually restrict Black's play on that flank.

**14...Ne5 15 Bxa6 Qxa6 16 Nb5 Qb6**

I'm not totally convinced by the development of the knight to a6. A straightforward alternative was 16...Nbd7 when 17 a4 (and not 17 a3? c4! followed by an invasion on d3) 17...Qb6 18 Be3 a6 19 Na3 will be followed by Ndc4, but Black remains pretty solid here and shouldn't be more than a touch worse.

**17 Be3 Na6 18 a3! (Diagram 17)**

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Now the possibility of a timely b2-b4 forces Black backwards.

### 18...Rab8 19 Nc3 Qb7?!

I don't understand this move. More to the point was 19...Nc7 20 f4 (or 20 b4 Qa6 21 Qxa6 Nxa6 22 b5 Nc7) 20...Nd7 when at least Black would have obtained some standard Benko counterplay with ...Nb5.

### 20 Rab1

The plan begun on move 14 is complete. Everything is under control on the queenside, and Grivas is finally ready to push f3-f4.

### 20...Rfc8 21 f4 Nd7 22 Nc4 Qc7 23 Na4! Rb3?

Black was probably again concerned about the b2-b4 push, but he must have underestimated the strength of a knight coming to a5.

### 24 Bd2! Rbb8 25 Na5 Nb6 26 Qxa6! Nxa4 27 Nc6 (Diagram 18)

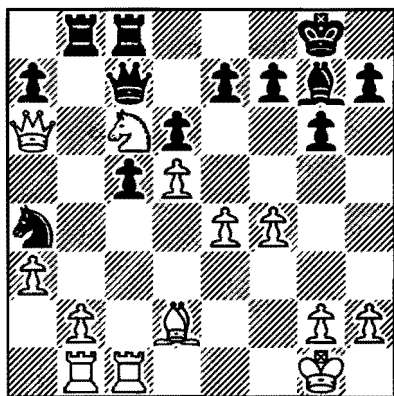


Diagram 18 (B)

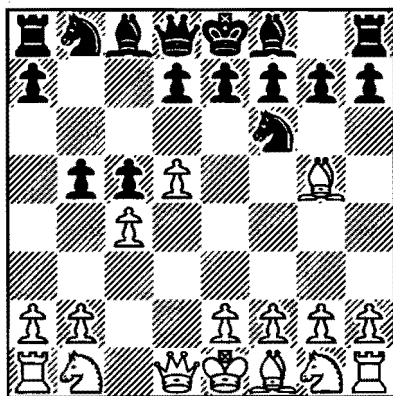


Diagram 19 (B)

### 27...Rxb2?

Losing immediately, although Black's position was most unenviable in any case: 27...Nxb2 28 e5 dxe5 29 Ba5 Qb7 30 Qxb7 Rxb7 31 Rxb2 Rxb2 32 Nxe7+ Kf8 33 Nxc8 also had to be avoided, while 27...Nb6 28 Nxb8 Rxb8 29 Bc3 would just have left him a clear exchange in arrears.

### 28 Rxb2 1-0

Pretty good too was 28 Ba5, but the text was sufficient to force resignation since 28...Bxb2 29 Qxc8+! Qxc8 30 Nxe7+ Kf8 31 Nxc8 Bxc1 32 Bxc1 sees White emerge a piece ahead.

Not every reader will want to handle the early middlegame as patiently as Grivas, but so long as Black can be contained down the b-file, White should maintain an

edge in these Sämisch-like structures. Furthermore, for the less patient and more bloodthirsty there's always f3-f4 available, followed by arranging the ideal e4-e5 push and/or launching a kingside attack.

## Looking A Little Deeper

### 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 (Diagram 19)

In approximately two-thirds of all the games which I could find with 4 Bg5, Black plumped for 4...Ne4, but white players should not neglect the alternatives. We will now consider:

**A: 4...g6**

**B: 4...d6**

**C: 4...bxc4**

**D: 4...Qb6**

**E: 4...Ne4**

A couple of other moves have also been tried:

a) 4...b4 might turn out to be a premature release of the tension, but the position can quickly become quite sharp: 5 Nd2 d6 6 a3! (wasting no time in undermining Black's extended queenside) 6...Nbd7 (Black preferred 6...bxa3 7 Rxa3 e5 8 dxe6! Bxe6 in E.Ubilava-I.Glek, Minsk 1983, and now Stohl's suggestion of 9 g3 gives White a pleasant edge, with Bg2 followed by Nh3-f4 the plan) 7 axb4 cxb4 8 Qa4 a5 (Diagram 20)

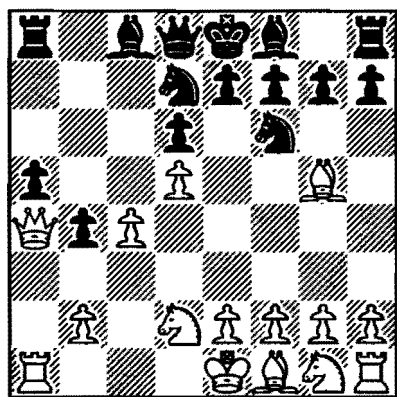


Diagram 20 (W)

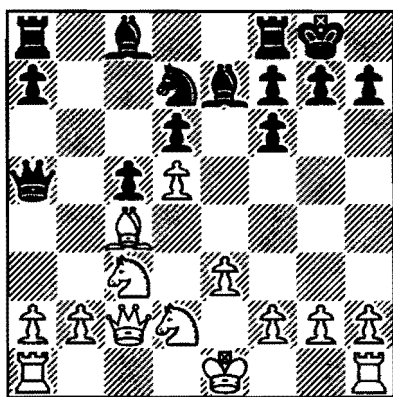


Diagram 21 (B)

9 e4 (9 Nb3 g6 10 Bxf6 exf6 11 Nxa5 Qb6 is probably too ambitious, but White might consider 9 Ngf3 g6 10 Nd4!?) 9...g6 10 c5! (White must act before Black completes his kingside development and gains a model blockade with ...Nc5) 10...Bg7 11 Qc6 Rb8 12 cxd6 0-0 13 Ngf3 exd6 14 Qxd6 h6 15 Bxf6 Bxf6 16 Nc4 wasn't too clear, but appeared to favour White in S.Dyachkov-G.Vescovi, Halle 1995.

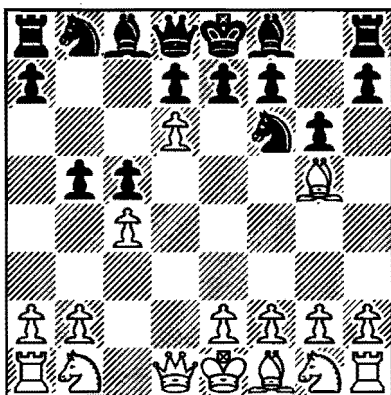
b) 4...Qa5+ is a common device in this variation, but is rarely seen so early. That might be because 5 Qd2 is possible here, and 5...Qxd2+ 6 Nxd2 offers White prospects of a small edge. It's also possible to be more ambitious with 5 Nd2!? when 5...bxc4 (critical) 6 Bxf6 exf6 (the position is rather Trompowsky-like too after 6...gxf6: for example, 7 e3 Na6 8 Bxc4 Rb8 9 Ngf3! Rxb2 10 0-0 Nb4 11 Rb1 Rxb1 12 Qxb1 when White's safer king and lead in development supply decent compensation for the pawn) 7 Qc2 d6 8 e3 Be7 9 Bxc4 0-0 10 Ne2 Nd7 11 Nc3 (**Diagram 21**) 11...Ba6 12 0-0 Bxc4 13 Nxc4 Qa6 14 b3 Ne5 was unbalanced but about equal in A.Summerscale-S.Ansell, British Championship, Nottingham 1996.



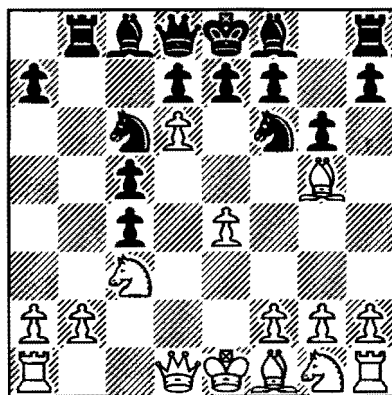
**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION: Black can also meet 5 Nd2 with 5...Ne4 when 6 Bf4 transposes to Line E3.**

However, quite possibly White should play more aggressively and 5...Ne4 6 b4! (a motif we've already seen, but here White might not have to retreat his bishop from g5) 6...Qxb4 7 Rb1 Qc3 8 Rb3 Qe5? (now Black loses too much time; 8...Qa5 9 Rxb5 Qc3 10 Rb3 Qa5 should be preferred, although White has an edge here since 11 Bf4 Na6 can be well met by 12 Qb1) 9 Ngf3 Qf5 10 Qb1 Nd6 11 e4 was superb for White in P.Hummel-D.Goldenberg, North Bay 1998.

**A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 g6 5 d6! (Diagram 22)**



**Diagram 22 (B)**



**Diagram 23 (W)**

**5...bxc4!?**

For details of both 5...Bb7 and 5...exd6 please see the notes to Miles-Bellon Lopez. Black has also tried 5...e6?!, but this looks rather suspect and 6 cxb5 Bg7 7 Nc3 h6 8 Bf4 (8 Be3!? looks quite promising too) 8...Bb7 9 Be5 0-0 10 Nf3 a6 11 a4! (continuing to prevent the development of the knight from b8) 11...Qa5 12 Rc1 c4?! (a better try is 12...axb5!? 13 axb5 Ne4, although Black's problems with his knight persist after 14 Bxg7 Kxg7 15 e3 Qb4 16 Be2! Qxb2 17 Nxe4 Bxe4 18 0-0 when White enjoys promising compensation) 13 Qd4 Ne8 14 Bxg7 Nxg7 15 e4 was excellent for White in V.Mikhalevski-W.Hendriks, Vlissingen 2000.

**6 Nc3**

**BEWARE! At first 6 Bxf6 exf6 7 Qd5? looks very tempting since White has two large threats, but after 7...Qb6 (Grivas) it is actually Black who enjoys a dangerous initiative.**

**6...exd6!?**

Untried, but this can quickly lead to fascinating and murky complications. In E.Grivas-J.Kjeldsen, Cannes 1995, Black preferred 6...Nc6 when Grivas suggests 7 e4!? (7 Qd2 Bg7 8 e4 h6! ensured Black of decent counterplay in the game) 7...h6 8 Be3 (another option is 8 Bxf6!? exf6 9 Bxc4 Bg7 10 Nf3 0-0 11 0-0 when White's grip on the position may well outweigh Black's unopposed and currently blunted dark-squared bishop) 8...exd6 9 Bxc4 and Black's weaknesses down the d-file give White good compensation.

Going back to the position after 7 e4, Fedorowicz has suggested 7...Rb8!? (**Diagram 23**) when White must be happy to sacrifice a further pawn and the position remains rather unclear after 8 Nf3 exd6 (Black doesn't have to take both pawns, but 8...Rxb2 9 Qc1! Rb8 10 e5 looks strong, especially in view of the plausible variation 10...Ng4 11 Nd5! Qa5+ 12 Bd2 Bh6 13 Bxa5 Bxc1 14 Rxc1 Nxa5 15 h3 Nh6 16 Nxe7) 9 Bxc4 Rxb2 10 Qc1! (once again it makes sense to immediately challenge the rook, and now the queen may take up a strong post on f4 or even h6) 10...Rb8 11 0-0 Be7 12 Bh6 when White retains decent compensation due to his active pieces.

There's also Miles's suggestion of 6...Bb7 when I would rather play White after 7 Nf3!? (7 Qd2 has been suggested by Grivas, but Black should be okay after 7...Bg7 8 Nf3 0-0, followed by ...exd6) 7...Bg7 (White is also better after 7...Ne4 8 Nxe4 Bxe4 9 Nd2 Qa5 10 f3 Bb7 11 e4) 8 Ne5! 0-0 9 Nxc4.

**7 Ne4!? (Diagram 24)**

The most aggressive choice, although White can also continue in gambit mode with 7 e4 Be7 8 Bxc4.

**7...Be7 8 Nxd6+ Kf8 9 Bxf6**

At first this looks very strong, but if the following analysis holds up, White might

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

prefer 9 e4!? when 9...Ba6 10 e5!? (otherwise after 10 Bxc4 Bxc4 White must exchange on f6 to avoid losing the e4-pawn) 10...Qa5+! 11 Bd2 Qb6 12 Nxc4 Qe6 looks like quite a critical and rather unclear continuation.

### 9...Bxf6 10 Qd5 Kg7!

The only move. Instead 10...Qa5+? 11 Kd1 Ke7 12 Qxf7+ Kxd6 13 Qxf6+ misplaces both kings, but sees White emerge a rook ahead.

### 11 0-0-0! (Diagram 25)

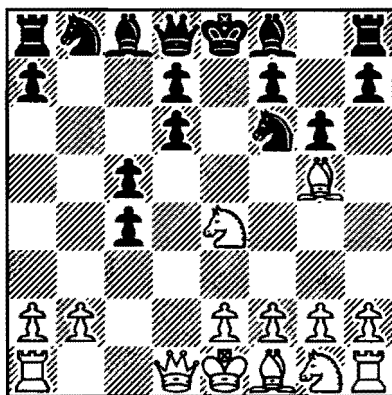


Diagram 24 (B)

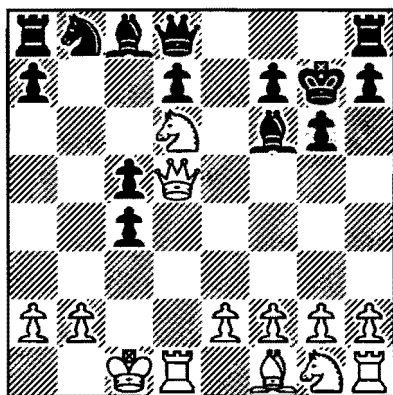


Diagram 25 (B)

Now it's White's turn to be careful: 11 Qxa8? Qa5+ 12 Kd1 Qa4+, with a strong attack for Black, would not be the correct path.

### 11...Qe7

Black is walking something of a tightrope here, but is able to survive according to a most impressive piece of analysis by Grivas. Perhaps the reader can find a route to the advantage in this fascinating position, but I haven't yet been able to:

a) 12 Qxa8? Nc6 13 Nxc8 Qe5 14 Rd2 Qc7 is obviously not the way to go.

b) 12 e3 was considered best by Grivas, but his 12...Nc6 13 Bxc4 doesn't seem at all clear to me after 13...Rb8! (Diagram 26): for example, 14 Rd2 Nb4! 15 Qxc5 (or 15 Qxf7+ Qxf7 16 Nxf7 d5 17 Bxd5 Rf8 18 Nd6 Nxd5 19 Nxc8 Rfxc8 20 Rxd5 Rxb2 with a strong initiative and attack) 15...Ba6 16 Bxa6 Nxa6 and White's king is decidedly uncomfortable.

c) 12 Nxc8!? (critical) 12...Rxc8! (the best try, whereas Black shouldn't have enough for the piece after 12...Bxb2+? 13 Kxb2 Qf6+ 14 Kc2 Nc6 15 Qf3! Nb4+ 16 Kb1 Rb8 17 Qxf6+ Kxf6 18 Rd6+) 13 Qxa8 Bxb2+! 14 Kxb2 Qf6+ (Diagram 27) is Grivas' main idea. White is a rook and a piece ahead, but his king is extremely exposed: 15 Kb1



(15 Kc2? Nc6! 16 Qxc8 Nb4+ 17 Kb1 Qc3 18 Rc1 Qd2 is not the way to go since White must give up a whole queen on a6 just to keep the game going) 15...Rc6! (deviating from Grivas' analysis; that gave 15...Nc6? 16 Qxc8 Qf5+ when it is not easy to avoid perpetual, but I believe that White can with 17 Kc1 Nb4 18 e4! Qxe4 19 Bd3!, after which Black seems to come up short, especially in view of the line 19...Nxd3+ 20 Rxd3 cxd3 21 Qxc5 Qxg2 – 21...Qe1+ 22 Kb2 d2 23 Qd4+ Kg8 24 Nf3 halts the pawn and leaves White a clear piece ahead – 22 Qe5+ Kf8 23 Qg3 Qxh1 24 f3 and with Black's queen stuck in the corner, White should be winning) 16 Qxb8 Rb6+ 17 Qxb6 Qxb6+ 18 Kc2 Qa5 leaves White with two rooks and two pieces for the queen, but Black's active queen and c-pawn are able to combine to force perpetual.

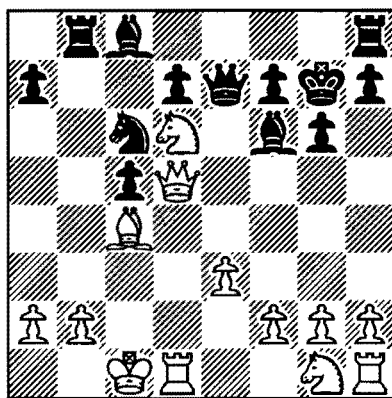


Diagram 26 (W)

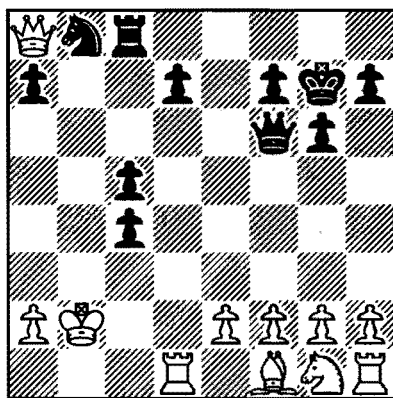


Diagram 27 (W)

Should Black be determined to play provocatively, 4...g6 is not such a bad try, although he must tread carefully after 5 d6. Only 5...bxc4 really challenges White, after which the better-prepared player should have the upper hand in the resulting rather complex positions.

#### **B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 d6 (Diagram 28) 5 Nd2**

A simple approach, White defends c4 and prepares to take over the centre with e2-e4. This has been successfully employed by a number of strong players, but some readers may prefer the more uncompromising exchange on f6. Following 5 Bxf6!? exf6 (not the only option, and the more dynamic 5...gxf6!? might well improve; certainly 6 cxb5 a6 7 e4 Bg7 8 Nc3 Qa5! 9 Qd2 f5 gave Black reasonable counterplay in L.Giuffrida-P.Eyheragaray, Buenos Aires 1992) 6 cxb5 g6 7 Nf3 Bg7 8 Nc3 0-0 9 e3 a6 10 a4 f5 the position is something of a cross between the 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 Benko and the Trompowsky. Matters aren't totally clear, but I would pre-

fer to play White who enjoys quite a solid set-up. E.Ubilava-S.Gorelov, Telavi 1982, continued 11 Be2 axb5 12 Bxb5 Qa5 13 0-0 Bxc3 (not a move Black probably wanted to play, but I suspect that Gorelov was worried that otherwise he would simply be a pawn down for insufficient compensation, especially with White enjoying a strong grip on the b5-square) 14 bxc3 Qxc3 15 Nd2 Na6 16 Nc4 Qf6 17 Na5! Nb4 18 Nc6 and White maintained an edge.

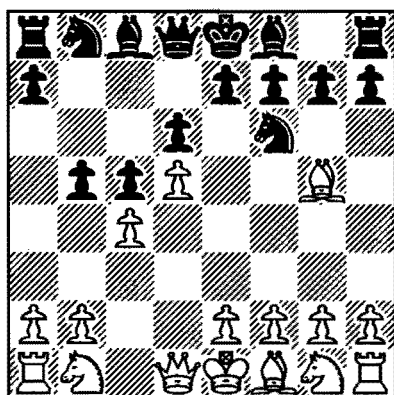


Diagram 28 (W)

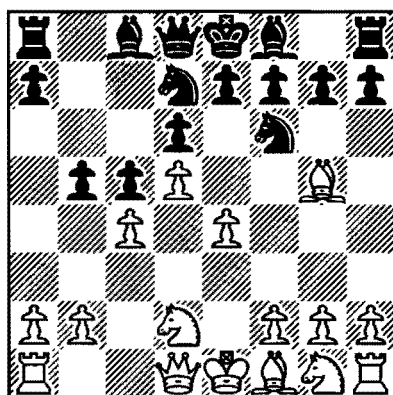


Diagram 29 (B)

## 5...Nbd7

Black's usual choice. He can try to do without this, but 5...g6 6 e4 Bg7 7 cxb5 a6 (E.Grivas-I.Horvath, Dortmund 1990) 8 bxa6 0-0 9 Ngf3 Bxa6 (probably Black should play less routinely, although I'd still slightly prefer to be White after 9...Nxa6!? 10 Be2 Nc7 11 0-0 e6 12 dxe6 Nxe6 13 Bh4) 10 Bxa6 Nxa6 11 0-0 gives White the upper hand due to his useful control of the c4-square, and 5...bxc4 6 e4 (6 Nxc4!? Nbd7 7 Qa4 is a rather tempting alternative) 6...g6 (G.Van der Stricht-A.Dhooghe, Ghent 2006) 7 Bxc4 Bg7 8 Ne2 0-0 9 Nc3 should also suffice for a small edge.

## 6 e4 (Diagram 29) 6...g6

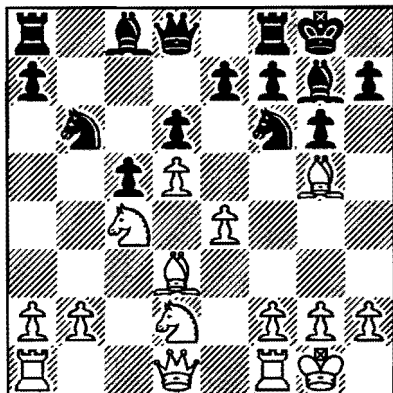
Black preferred 6...bxc4 in I.Sokolov-I.Manor, Groningen 1986, but rather than allow good counterplay with 7 Qc2?! h6 8 Bf4 g5! 9 Bg3 Nh5, White should have preferred the simple 7 Bxc4.

## 7 Ngf3

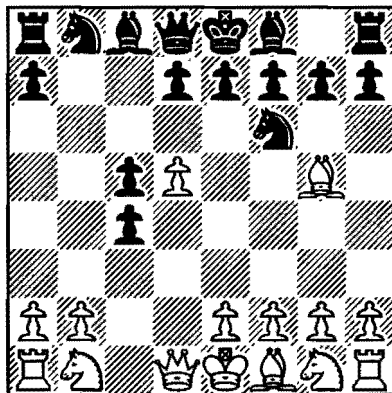
With his queen's knight well placed on d2, White might also take the pawn straight away and 7 cxb5!? Bg7 8 Ne2 a6 9 Nc3 0-0 10 a4! (maintaining control of b5 once again helps to limit Black's counterplay) 10...Ne8 11 Be2 Nc7 12 0-0 gave him an ideal set-up in G.Van der Stricht-E.Knoppert, Antwerp 1997.

### 7...Bg7 8 Bd3 0-0 9 0-0

We've been following no lesser game than V.Ivanchuk-T.Giorgadze, Moscow 1987. Now 9...bxc4 10 Nxc4 Nb6 11 Nfd2 (**Diagram 30**) should maintain an edge, but this is probably preferable for Black to the game's 9...Ng4 10 cxb5 a6 11 bxa6 Nde5 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 13 Be2 h6 14 Bf4 Bxa6 15 Bxa6 Rxa6 16 Bxe5! Bxe5 17 Nc4 when Ivanchuk's strong knight assured him of some advantage.



**Diagram 30 (B)**



**Diagram 31 (W)**

A number of fairly strong players have tried 4...d6 as Black, but it strikes me as being a little slow and after 5 Nbd2 White has good chances to emerge from the opening with a pleasant edge.

### C) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 bxc4! (Diagram 31)

A solid choice and one employed by Michael Adams when he was still a regular Benko exponent.

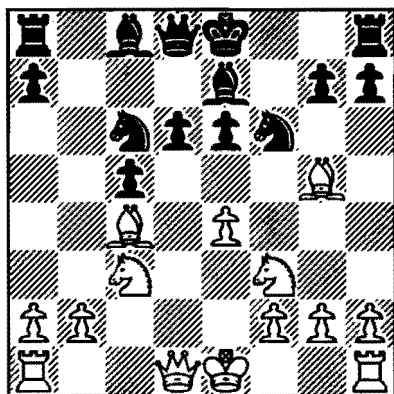
#### 5 Nc3

Once again White has tended to avoid exchanging on f6, presumably reckoning that the early queenside activity gives Black an improved version of the Trompowsky. Nevertheless, matters may not be so clear: for example, 5 Bxf6! gxf6 (or 5...exf6 6 e4 Qa5+ 7 Nc3 Ba6 8 Nf3 Bd6 9 Qa4 which was complex and about equal in T.Rosenkraenzer-C.Herrmann, Cologne 2000) 6 Nc3 Qb6 7 Rb1 f5 (probably Black needs to be more energetic, such as with 7...d6 8 e3 Rg8!? 9 Qa4+ Nd7 10 Qxc4 Ne5, reaching a rather obscure position) 8 e3 Bg7 9 Bxc4 and White's king's knight will find a good home on either f4 or g3.

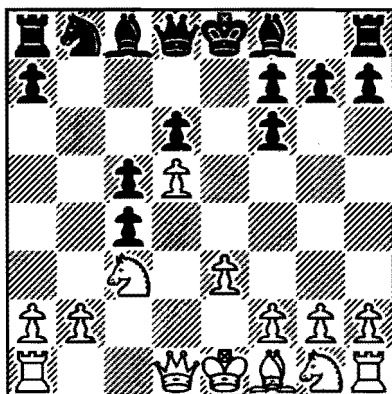
#### 5...d6

Continuing solidly. Black has also tried:

a) After 5...e6 6 e4 d6 7 Bxc4 the centre is likely to open and that should favour White. L.Zsinka-A.Szieberth, Balatonbereny 1994, continued 7...Be7 8 dxe6! fxe6 9 Nf3 Nc6 (**Diagram 32**) and now 10 e5!? is tempting, but probably strongest is 10 Qa4!, with the idea of 10...Bd7 11 Bxe6! Bxe6 12 Qxc6+ Bd7 13 Qa6, picking up a pawn.



**Diagram 32 (W)**



**Diagram 33 (B)**

b) 5...Qa5!? 6 Qd2 (6 Bxf6!? again deserves consideration; after, for example, 6...gxf6 7 e3 Ba6 8 Nf3 Bg7 9 Qc2 f5 10 Nd2 Black's structural weaknesses look more important than his unopposed dark-squared bishop) 6...d6 7 e4 Nbd7 (a simple approach and one which avoids the somewhat more complex situation which arose after 7...Ba6 8 f4! Nbd7 9 Nf3 h6! 10 Bxf6 exf6 11 Be2 g6 12 0-0 Bg7 13 Qc2 0-0 14 f5 in P.Kiriakov-D.De Vreugt, Dieren 1997) 8 Bxc4 Ba6 9 Bxa6 Qxa6 10 Nge2 g6 11 0-0 Bg7 and as White couldn't bring a knight to c4, Black was fine in J.Kjeldsen-J.Sorensen, Danish League 2001.

## 6 Bxf6!?

Once again I quite like this idea of altering the structure, but Grivas has preferred 6 e4. Then 6...g6 7 Bxc4 Bg7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 0-0 Nbd7 10 Re1 Rb8 11 Qc2 gave him a familiar set-up and a small edge in E.Grivas-M.Tassopoulos, Nikea 2003, but 6...Qa5 is more critical, transposing after 7 Qd2 to note 'b' to Black's 5th move, above.

## 6...exf6 7 e3 (Diagram 33)

Solid and best: by refusing to push his e-pawn all the way, White avoids allowing any early counterplay with ...f5.

## 7...Be7

Considering what follows, I'm not too sure why Adams rejected the immediate 7...g6. Certainly 8 Bxc4 (White wants to later bring his king's knight to f4; that is often a good square for it, but here I wonder whether 8 Nf3!? Bg7 9 Nd2 0-0 10 Nxc4 isn't a more testing sequence) 8...Bg7 9 Qa4+ Nd7 10 Ba6 0-0 11 Bxc8 Qxc8 12 Nge2 f5 13 0-0 Nf6 was okay for Black and about level in W.Arencibia Rodriguez-P.Pazos, Medellin 1987.

### 8 Bxc4

Again 8 Nf3 0-0 9 Nd2 is an idea, although Black can obtain a reasonable position with 9...Nd7!? 10 Nxc4 Ne5.

### 8...0-0 9 Bd3

I quite like the way Murshed manoeuvres. Instead Black seems to be okay after 9 Nge2 Nd7 10 Nf4 Ne5 11 Be2 Rb8.

### 9...Nd7 10 Nf3 Rb8 11 Qc2 g6 12 e4 (Diagram 34)

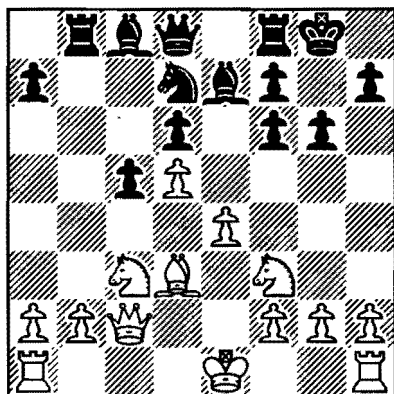


Diagram 34 (B)

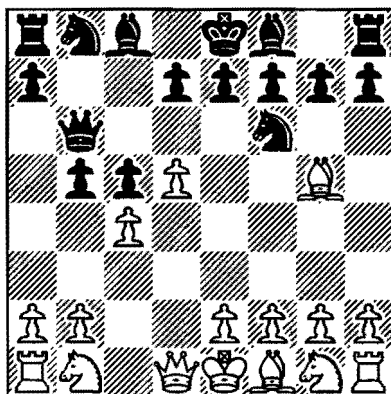


Diagram 35 (W)

### 12...Re8

A logical but slow regrouping. Quite possibly 12...Ne5!? is more accurate when White must avoid 13 Be2?! due to 13...Nxf3+ 14 Bxf3 f5.

### 13 0-0 Bf8 14 b3 a6 15 Rae1 Bg7 16 Nd1! a5 17 Ne3

Now White will bring a knight to c4 and he enjoyed a small edge in N.Murshed-M.Adams, London 1991.

4...bxc4 is a tough nut to crack, whether or not White hurries with an exchange on f6. I suspect that many black players will find their position slightly less comfortable should the exchange be made, but objectively this variation is something of a theoretical obstacle for White.

## D) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 Qb6 (Diagram 35)

If we imagine that White had played 2 Nf3 rather than 2 c4, this early queen deployment would be quite common as Black prevents any damage to his structure. The move is also quite plausible here, not least because of the pressure generated against b2, and was once suggested by Gufeld.

### 5 Nd2

As 5 Qc2 Na6! is annoying, I prefer this standard method of covering the c4-pawn.



**ROLL THE DICE!** Those who really like to confuse their opponents early on might also consider 5 Nc3!? b4 6 Nb1, as was once played by no lesser player than Tukmakov!

White sacrifices time to close the queenside and will now be able to expand in the centre. V.Tukmakov-D.Rajkovic, Hastings 1972/3, continued 6...Ne4 (tempting, but there was no need to be quite so ambitious: Black enjoys a roughly equal share of the chances after both the straightforward 6...g6 7 Nd2 Bg7 8 e4 d6, when White must avoid 9 f4?! Nh5!, and 6...h6!? 7 Bf4 g5) 7 Bc1 Qf6?! (this is definitely too ambitious and now Black's knight becomes a target; better is 7...g6 when 8 f3 Nd6!? 9 e4 Bg7, followed by ...f5, looks most unclear) 8 Nf3 d6 and now I rather like Pederesen's cute idea of 9 Qc2! Bf5? (Black should probably prefer 9...Qg6 when White is only a little better after 10 Nh4 Qg4 11 g3 Nf6 12 Bg2) 10 g4! Bg6 11 Qa4+ Nd7 12 h4 when Black must lose material in view of the line 12...h6 13 g5 Qf5 14 Bh3.

### 5...bxc4

Black might also consider 5...h6 6 Bf4 d6 7 e4 g5!? 8 Bg3 bxc4 9 Bxc4 Bg7, but this is probably too ambitious and White is better after 10 Rb1 0-0 11 h4! g4 12 h5.

### 6 e4 (Diagram 36)

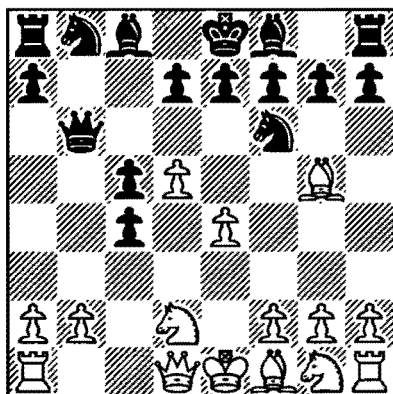


Diagram 36 (B)

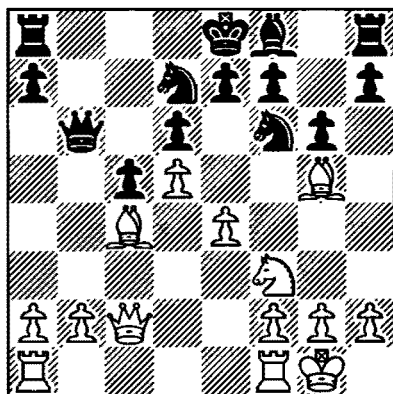


Diagram 37 (B)

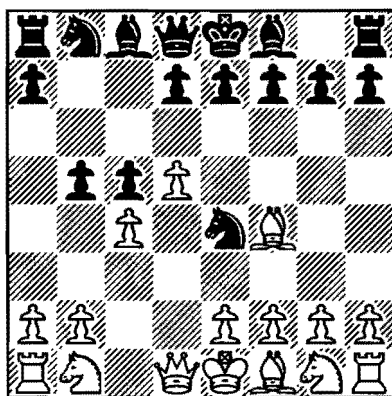
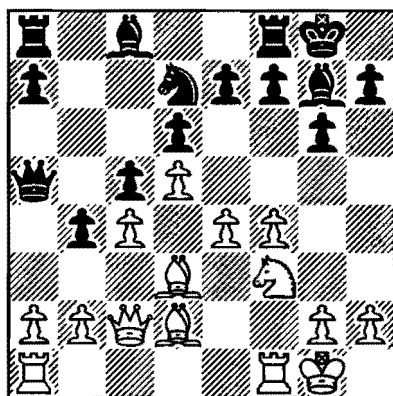
**6...Ba6**

White was a little better too after 6...d6 7 Nxc4 Qc7 8 Bd3 Nbd7 9 Qa4! g6 10 Ne2 (10 Qc6!? is also tempting; Black must then avoid 10...Qxc6? 11 dxc6 Nb8 12 Nxd6+! exd6 13 Bxf6, but 10...Qb7 11 Ne2 Bg7 12 0-0 0-0 13 Nc3 restricts White to an edge) 10...Bg7 11 Nc3 0-0 12 0-0 in Z.Necesany-K.Petrzelka, correspondence 1983. Note the queenside problems Black can face when White quickly gains a knight on c4.

**7 Qc2 g6**

Now, as well as the 8 Ne2!? Bg7 9 Nc3 of M.Loemker-L.Boehle, German League, 1992, White should consider the straightforward 8 Nxc4, leading to quite a pleasant set-up after 8...Bxc4 (otherwise Black can easily run into trouble in the centre, such as after 8...Qc7?! 9 Nf3 d6 10 e5!) 9 Bxc4 d6 10 Nf3 Nbd7 11 0-0 (**Diagram 37**) when White has the bishop pair and a grip on the position.

I must admit that I had wondered whether 4...Qb6 might be a reasonable way to avoid the doubling of Black's pawns, but after 5 Nd2 bxc4 6 e4 White will often hit the queen with Nxc4 and should emerge with an edge.

**E) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 Ne4 5 Bf4 (**Diagram 38**)****Diagram 38 (B)****Diagram 39 (B)**

Pretty much essential: White needs the bishop to be able to cover the d2-square, and doesn't want to see it exchanged after 5 Bh4?! g5!.

Now we have a further divide:

**E1: 5...bxc4**

**E2: 5...d6**

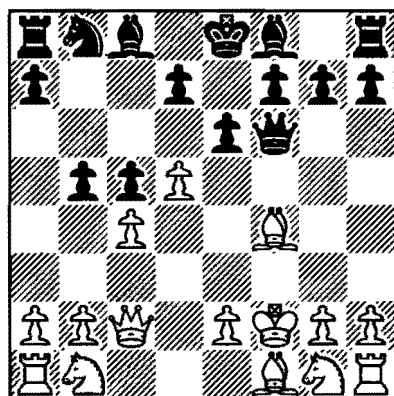
**E3: 5...Qa5+**

Lines E1 and E2 are quite solid choices, whereas play can quickly become quite sharp in Line E3, especially if Black meets 6 Nd2 with 6...g5.

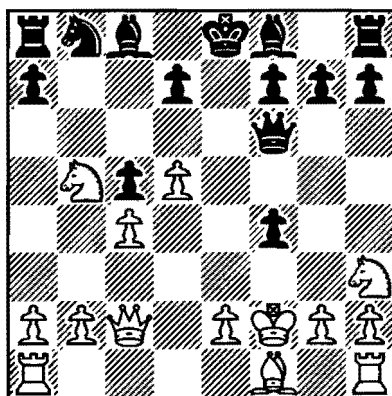
Rarer alternatives are:

a) 5...g6 is a little compliant and 6 Qc2 (covering b2 and c4, while attacking the knight, but White also has 6 f3 when 6...Qa5+ 7 Nd2 Nf6 8 e4 d6 transposes to Line E2) 6...Qa5+ (or 6...Nf6 7 e4 bxc4 8 Bxc4 Bg7 9 Nf3 0-0 when White might accept the provocation with 10 e5!?, but the straightforward 10 0-0 d6 11 Nc3 Ba6 12 Nd2 Qb6 13 b3 Nbd7 14 Rab1 gave him a small, standard edge in L.Zsinka-A.Honos, Hungarian League 1995) 7 Nd2 Nxd2 8 Bxd2 b4 9 e4 Bg7 10 f4 d6 11 Bd3 0-0 12 Nf3 Nd7 13 0-0 (**Diagram 39**) saw White's powerful centre give him the advantage in E.Kahn-L.Boer, Budapest 1999.

b) 5...e6 is quite an ambitious try, but briefly received a good press when 6 Qc2 Nxf2?! (probably too optimistic; Black should prefer 6...Nd6 as Arkhipov earlier had, although White is better after 7 Nc3!: 7...Qa5 8 cxb5 Nxb5 9 Bd2 Na6 10 Nxb5 Qxb5 11 e4 Nb4 12 Qb3 Qb6 13 Bc4 supplied an easy edge in G.Kaidanov-S.Arkhipov, Moscow 1985, but Black was probably wise to avoid both 7...bxc4 8 0-0-0! and 7...Nxc4 8 Nxb5 Qa5+ 9 Nc3 exd5 10 0-0-0!, as pointed out by Kaidanov) 7 Kxf2 Qf6 (**Diagram 40**) received a positive write-up from its creator, Sergey Arkhipov, in *Informant 40*.



**Diagram 40 (W)**



**Diagram 41 (B)**



b1) 8 Qe4 was given an exclamation in the later *Informant 43*, but I have to beg to disagree. Following 8...g5 9 Nh3 gxf4 10 Nc3 matters would have remained quite unclear in W.Arencibia-B.Lugo, Cuban Championship 1986, had Black found 10...bxc4!: for example, 11 Nb5 Bb7 12 Nc7+ Kd8 13 Nxa8 Bd6 with good play for the exchange, or 11 dxe6 Qd4+ 12 Qxd4 cxd4 13 Nb5 Na6 when the position is a mess, but I'm not a fan of White's poorly co-ordinated forces. Perhaps 11 Qxc4 is the best try when 11...e5 12 Ne4 Qg6 isn't too clear, but Black is ready to develop with ...Ba6 and/or ...f5.

b2) The earlier Z.Kormanyos-S.Arkipov, Harkany 1985, had continued 8 Nh3 e5 (8...g5 was preferred in G.Kallai-J.Kwasniewski, Berlin 1988, but 9 Qc3! is promising since White's well-placed knights and extra pawn look more important than Black's dark-square play after 9...Qxc3 10 Nxc3 gxf4 11 Nxb5 Na6 12 Nxf4) and now 9 Nc3! looks both energetic and rather logical to me. Following 9...exf4 10 Nxb5 (**Diagram 41**) we have:

b21) White appears to be doing well after 10...Na6 11 Qe4+ Kd8 12 Qxf4 Qxb2 13 Ng5!. One key line runs 13...Qxa1 (or 13...f6 14 Nf7+ Ke8 15 Nbd6+ Bxd6 16 Nxd6+ Ke7 17 Nf5+ Kf7 18 Rd1 Qe5 19 Qxe5 fxe5 20 Rb1 with an enduring plus) 14 Nxf7+ Ke8 (and not 14...Ke7? 15 d6+ Ke8 16 Ne5! with a decisive attack) 15 Nxe8 Qf6 16 e3 and as White can rescue his knight, he appears to be doing well, such as with 16...Be7 17 Bd3 g6 18 Qxf6 Bxf6 19 Nd6+ Ke7 20 Nhf7 Nb4 21 Bb1 Rb8 22 Kg3 Bb7 23 e4 and the tricky knights remain immune.

b22) In his notes Arkhipov only analyses the alternative 10...Kd8, but I can't agree with him that Black is doing well here: for example, 11 Qc3 (11 Qd2!? might be an even more promising path) 11...Qxc3 12 Nxc3 d6 13 Nxf4 and it is by no means apparent that Black's dark-squared bishop compensates for the missing pawn, especially in view of the line 13...g6 14 g3! Bg7 15 Nb5.

c) 5...e5!? is another creative and ambitious idea:

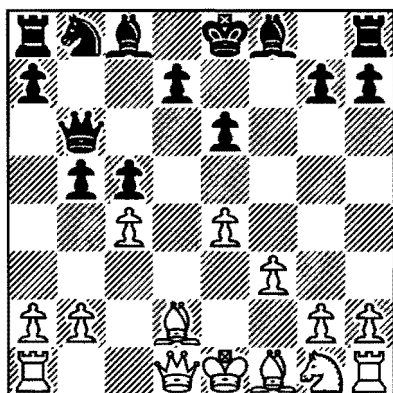
c1) An untried but logical counter is 6 dxe6!? fxe6 7 f3 Qa5+ (7...Qf6?! 8 Bxb8 Qxb2 9 fxe4 Qxa1 10 Bf4 is structurally messy, but should be good for White) 8 Nd2 Nxd2 9 Bxd2 Qb6 10 e4 (**Diagram 42**).

Here Black might enjoy an extra centre pawn, but White is developing quickly and I slightly prefer his game, such as after 10...bxc4 11 Bxc4 Ba6 12 Bxa6 Nxa6 13 Ne2 Be7 14 Bc3.

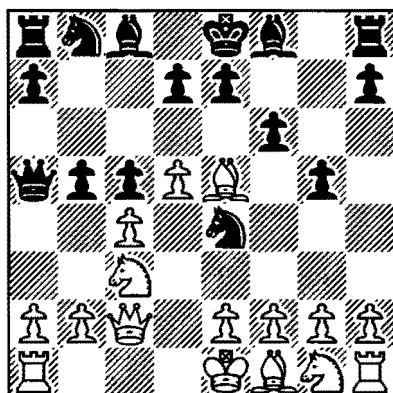
c2) Also quite possible is 6 Bxe5 d6 7 Bg3 (7 Nc3?! Qa5 8 f3 Nd7! 9 fxe4 Nxe5 10 cxb5 g6 gives Black good play on the dark squares) 7...Qa5+ 8 Nd2 bxc4 9 e3 Nd7 10 Ngf3 Nb6 11 Be2, especially because 11...c3!? 12 Nxe4! cxb2+ 13 Nfd2 bxa1 Q 14 Qxa1 left d6 weak and White with good play for the exchange in C.Santos-J.Mellado Trivino, Loures 1997.

d) 5...g5!? is another pretty rare line which isn't so easy to counter. Here I wonder about 6 Be5 Qa5+ (Black has also tried 6...f6 when again I quite like the untested 7 Nc3!?, after which 7...Qa5 transposes, while 7...Nxf2 8 Kxf2 fxe5 9 e4 looks like

being more fun for White than Black) 7 Nc3!? (only 7 Nd2 has been tried in practice, after which 7...f6 8 Bg3 bxc4 9 f3?! Nxc3 10 hxg3 c3 11 bxc3 Qxc3 12 Rc1 Qe5 turned out quite well for Black in P.Garrett-J.Peters, Los Angeles 2003) 7...f6 8 Qc2 (Diagram 43) for White.



**Diagram 42 (B)**



**Diagram 43 (B)**

Play might continue 8...fxe5 (8...Nxf2?! 9 Bxf6 exf6 10 Kxf2 appears to leave White with the safer king position, even though his king has already moved: following 10...bxc4 11 Nf3 Na6 12 Qf5 Qb6 13 d6! we find White already exploiting fully the downside to ...g5) 9 Qxe4 b4 (or 9...d6 10 cxb5 Nd7 11 Qc2 Nf6 12 e4 and White is for choice) 10 Nd1 d6 11 Nf3 when the structure is rather unusual, but I most certainly don't envy Black his kingside holes and potential bad bishops, especially as White can effectively tidy his position with e3, Nd2, Qc2 and Bd3.

## **E1) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 Ne4 5 Bf4 bxc4 (Diagram 44)**

Just like when played a move earlier (Line C), this is quite a solid choice, although White has reasonable chances to gain an edge here.

### **6 Qc2**



**ROLL THE DICE!** Those seeking a more complex position might prefer the rare 6 f3!?. I assume that this has generally been rejected due to the possibility of 6...Qa5+ (6...g5 7 Be5 f6 8 Nc3! fxe5 9 Nxe4 Qa5+ 10 Kf2 isn't clear, but I would rather play White) 7 Nd2 g5, but matters are once again far from clear after 8 Be5 f6 9 fxe4! fxe5 10 e3.

## 6...Qa5+

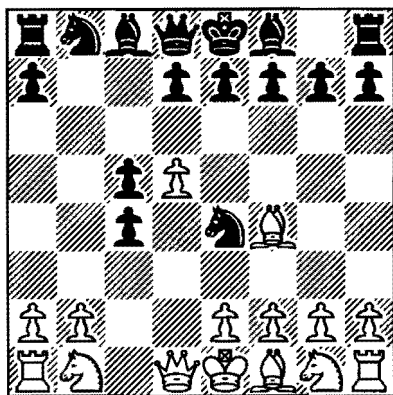


Diagram 44 (W)

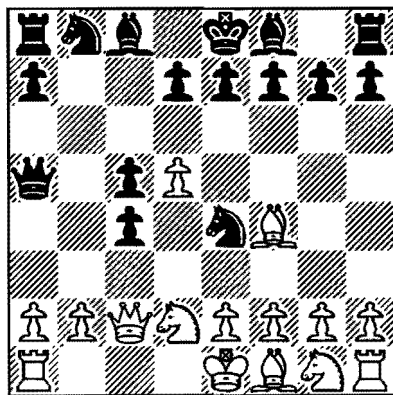


Diagram 45 (B)

Now we reach a position which can also come about via the move order 5...Qa5+ 6 Nd2 bxc4 7 Qc2. Black can also retreat immediately, but 6...Nf6 7 e4 offers White good chances of an edge: for example, 7...d6 (or 7...e6?! 8 Nc3 Bb7 9 Bxc4 exd5 10 exd5 d6 and now 11 Qe2+ Qe7 12 Nb5 Qxe2+ 13 Nxe2 was but one promising path in E.Grivas-I.Marinkovic, Leningrad 1989) 8 Bxc4 g6 9 Nf3 Bg7 10 0-0 0-0 11 h3!? (11 Nc3 Nbd7 12 Nd2 is a straightforward and reasonable alternative) 11...Ba6 12 Nbd2 Nfd7 13 Rab1! and White was slightly for choice in S.Peric-M.Lucaroni, Verona 1997.

## 7 Nd2 (Diagram 45)

This position should, of course, be closely compared with the illustrative game Grivas-Koerholz: the small difference being that White has played Qc2 rather than f3.

## 7...Nf6

Black's most popular move, but there are alternatives:

a) 7...Nxd2 8 Bxd2 Qb6 9 e4 Ba6?! (now Black runs into trouble and the superior Czech-Benoni style 9...e5!? was preferred in E.Grivas-E.Ermenkov, Sofia 1988, and after 10 Bc3 d6 11 Bxc4 Be7 12 Nf3 0-0 13 0-0 Ba6 14 Nd2 Bg5! Black had equalized; thus White should probably prefer 10 Nf3 d6 11 Bxc4 Be7 12 0-0 0-0 and now maybe 13 a3!?, looking to open the queenside with b2-b4) 10 Nf3 e6 (10...g6 11 Bc3 is also problematic for the second player) 11 Bxc4 Bxc4 12 Qxc4 Qa6 13 b3 Qxc4 14 bxc4 d6 15 Ke2 (Diagram 46) 15...Be7 16 Rab1 saw White invading down the b-file with a large advantage in A.Groszpeter-V.Mencinger, Belgrade 1988.

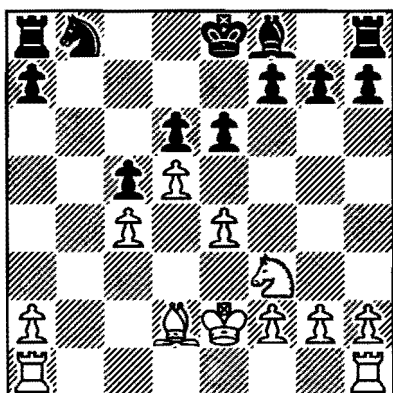


Diagram 46 (B)

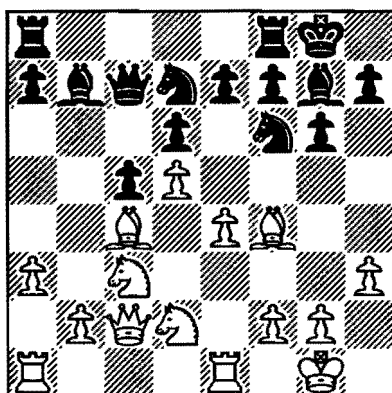


Diagram 47 (B)

b) Once again the radical thrust 7...g5 is possible, but after 8 Be5 f6 9 Qxe4 fxe5 (E.Kahn-J.Brustkern, Budapest 2005) 10 e3!?, White is slightly better following both 10...d6 11 Bxc4 Nd7 12 Ne2 Nf6 13 Qc2 and 10...c3 11 bxc3 Qxc3 12 Rb1 d6 13 Ngf3 Bh6 14 h4!.

#### 8 e4 d6

Play is likely to transpose after 8...g6, such as with 9 Bxc4 d6 10 Ne2 Bg7 11 0-0 Nbd7. I should also mention the rather ambitious 8...Na6 9 Bxc4 Nb4 when 10 Qc3! is strong, after which 10...Ba6 11 f3 d6 12 Ne2 Nd7?! 13 0-0 Nb6 14 b3 renewed the threat of a2-a3 and left Black struggling in N.Rose-D.Komljenovic, Las Palmas 1994.

#### 9 Bxc4 Nbd7

Black might also delay this with 9...g6 when 10 Ne2 remains a good option. However, in M.Zivanic-Z.Stanojosi, Belgrade 2007, White preferred the reasonable alternative 10 Ngf3 Bg7 11 0-0 0-0 12 Rfe1 Nbd7, after which the thematic breakthrough 13 e5!? dxe5 (13...Nh5 14 exd6! Nxf4 15 dxe7 Re8 16 d6 was White's main point, gaining excellent compensation for the piece, not least because f7 is vulnerable) 14 Nxe5 Nxe5 15 Bxe5 probably sufficed for a small pull.

#### 10 Ne2!

Once again White wants his knights on c3 and c4.

#### 10...g6 11 0-0 Bg7 12 Nc3 0-0 13 a3 Qc7 14 Rfe1 Bb7 15 h3 (Diagram 47)

White has developed harmoniously and enjoyed an edge in E.Grivas-C.Arduman, Athens 1989.



## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

14 Qa4+ Nfd7 15 Rc1 with good play for the pawn due to Black's vulnerable queenside light squares.

### 9 cxb5

Not the only try. White can also consider 9 Ne2 Bg7 10 cxb5 Nh5 11 Bg5 Qxb5 12 Rb1, followed by bringing the knights to c3 and c4, as was seen in J.Whitehead-D.Gurevich, US Championship, Greenville 1983.

### 9...Bg7 10 Qb3! (Diagram 49)

The best way of neutralizing the threat of 10...Nh5, and now Black's compensation isn't wholly convincing.

### 10...Nbd7

Black had to avoid 10...a6? 11 b6!, but perhaps he should have tried moving his a-pawn on his next turn.

**11 Ne2! 0-0 12 Nc3 Qc7 13 Be3 Ne5 14 Nc4 Nfd7 15 Be2 Nxc4 16 Bxc4 a6 17 0-0 axb5 18 Nxb5 Qb6 19 a4! Ba6 20 Be2**

We've been following another model Grivas example of how to consolidate White's extra pawn, E.Grivas-A.Deze, Munich 1986.

### E3) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 Bg5 Ne4 5 Bf4 Qa5+ 6 Nd2 g5!? (Diagram 50)

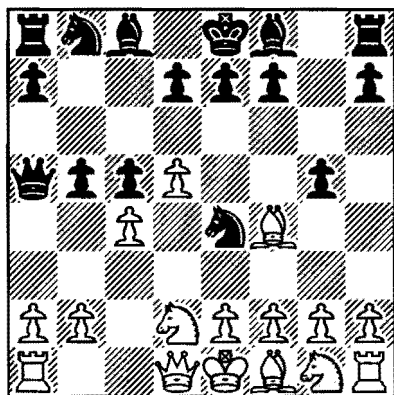


Diagram 50 (W)

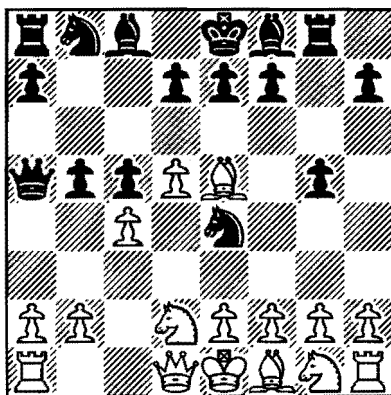


Diagram 51 (W)

Critical and as this is the main line in both Pedersen and Pinski's Benko works, it might well be the choice of a well-prepared player. Those reaching this position somewhat less well prepared might well, though, prefer something quieter.



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** White needs to be aware of a number of transpositions here: 6...bxc4 7 Qc2 reaches Line E1, while 6...d6 transposes to the notes to Black's 5th move in Grivas-Koerholz (7 b4!?), to Line E2 (after 7 f3), or to the notes to White's 6th move in Line E2 in the event of 7 Qc2.

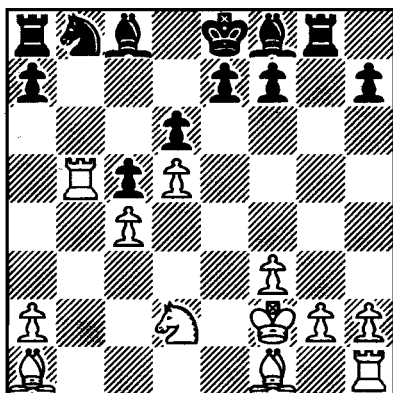
### 7 Be5

White has tried a number of alternatives, including Kahn's preferred 7 Qc2, but the text looks like the only real way to challenge Black.

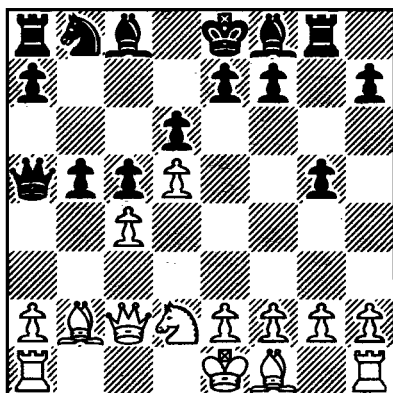
### 7...f6

By no means everyone is so keen to weaken their kingside light squares thus and 7...Rg8!? (**Diagram 51**) is an important alternative. Now 8...d6 is threatened and White has usually responded by blowing open the position with 8 b4!? (Seirawan has suggested the calmer 8 Qc2, with the idea of 8...Nxd2 9 Bc3, but 8...Qxd2+!? 9 Qxd2 Nxd2 10 Kxd2 d6 11 Bg3 bxc4 12 e4 Ba6 is more of a challenge, making it very tough for White to regain his pawn; likewise 8 f3 should be met by 8...Qxd2+! 9 Qxd2 Nxd2 10 Kxd2 d6 11 Bg3 bxc4 12 e4 Ba6 13 Rc1 Bg7) 8...Qxb4 9 Ngf3 and now:

a) Black has struggled after 9...g4 10 Rb1! Nc3 11 Rxb4! Nxd1 12 Rxb5 gxf3 13 exf3 d6 14 Ba1 Nxf2 15 Kxf2 (**Diagram 52**).



**Diagram 52 (B)**



**Diagram 53 (B)**

White's lead in development is very useful here and 15...Bh6 16 Ne4 Bd7 17 Rb1 Bf5 18 Bd3 Bg6 19 Rb7 Nd7 20 Rbh1 Bg7 21 f4 Bxa1 22 Rxa1 Kd8 23 a4 kept up the pressure in N.Murshed-J.Hodgson, London 1992.

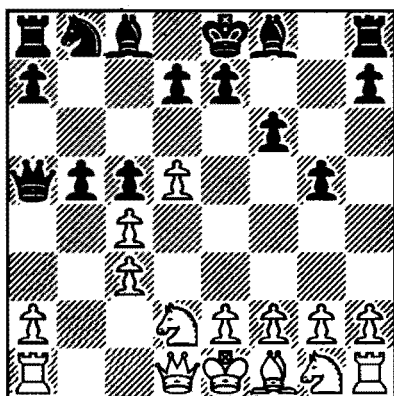
b) Kinsman has suggested 9...Nxd2 10 Nxd2 d6 11 Rb1 Qa3 12 Bb2 Qxa2, after

which 13 Qc2 (perhaps even better is 13 cxb5!? since 13...Qxd5 14 e4 Qb7 15 Bc4 e6 16 Qh5 gives White some initiative for his pawns: 0-0 and f2-f4 might well follow) 13...Qa4 14 Qxh7 Rg6 is, as he points out, 'very messy'.

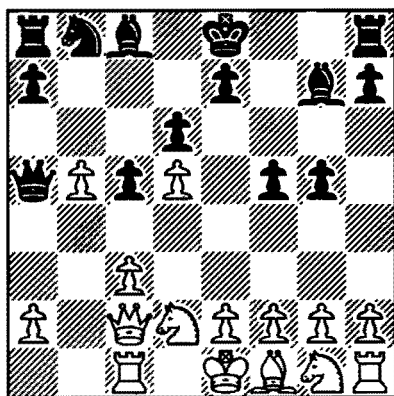
c) 9...Qa5!? has been approved by theory, but remains untried in practice. Following 10 Qc2!? (a new idea, trying not to block the rook in; White would like to make 10 Qb1 work, but after 10...Nxd2 11 Nxd2 d6 I'm not sure he has enough compensation: both 12 Bb2 bxc4 and 12 Qxh7 Rg6, as analysed by Paunovic, are a little problematic) 10...Nxd2 (10...f5!? looks extremely ambitious, but is not so silly with ...g5 already in, and after the possible variation 11 cxb5 d6 12 Bb2 g4 13 Nh4 Bh6 14 e3 Bg5 15 g3 Bxh4 16 gxh4 Nd7 17 Bd3 Ndf6 the position remains extremely murky and about level) 11 Nxd2 d6 12 Bb2 (**Diagram 53**), the key question is: does White have enough for his pawn? With his pressure down the a1-h8 and b1-h7 diagonals against Black's weakened kingside, he surely does. Let's see how play might continue: 12...Nd7 (or 12...Na6 13 cxb5 Qxb5 14 a3 Rb8 15 Bc3 Qd7 16 e3 and with Black's king remaining a long-term source for concern, I continue to quite like White's compensation) 13 e3 Nb6 14 cxb5! Nxd5 15 Bc4 Nb6 16 0-0 Nxc4 17 Nxc4 Qxb5 18 Qe4 and White has whipped up quite an initiative at the cost of a second pawn.

## 8 Bg3

The choice of the strongest players to have reached this position, but 8 Bc3!? Nxc3 9 bxc3 (**Diagram 54**) is a principled alternative, ensuring that the queenside won't close. Indeed, I quite like this attempt to open as many lines as possible:



**Diagram 54 (B)**



**Diagram 55 (B)**

a) 9...bxc4 10 Qc2 Ba6 11 e4 Bg7 12 Bxc4 sees White regaining the pawn with some ease, after which Black's kingside weaknesses may well continue to trouble him. V.Demian-D.Eisen, correspondence 1999, continued 12...d6 13 Ne2 Nd7 14 0-0 Ne5



15 Nb3 Qa4 16 Bxa6 Qxa6 17 Ng3 (homing in on those weakened light squares) 17...h5 18 Nf5 Kf7 19 f3! (preventing Black from clamping the kingside with ...g4) 19...Bh6 20 Rab1 Rag8 21 Nd2 g4 22 f4 Ng6 23 e5!, which saw White blow open the centre, before he quickly gained a crushing initiative after 23...dxe5 24 fxe5 Nxe5 25 Ne4 Rd8 26 d6.

b) 9...d6 10 Qc2 Bg7 is probably a better try, and now 11 cxb5!? (when this position was reached in practice, the even more ambitious 11 h4?! was preferred, but after 11...f5! 12 hxg5 Bxc3 13 Rd1 Nd7 14 Ngf3 Nb6 Black had good counterplay in P.Garrett-M.Crockett, Stillwater 2007) 11...f5 (or 11...Nd7 12 Nc4 Qc7 13 e3 Nb6 14 Rd1, maintaining control and keeping the idea of h2-h4 in reserve) 12 Rc1 (**Diagram 55**) prepares to break with e2-e4: for example, 12...Nd7 13 e4 a6?! (it's natural to want to open the a-file, but now White has a neat tactical idea) 14 Nc4 Qc7 15 Nf3 axb5 16 Nxg5! and White's knight-pair has successfully levered open the black position.

### 8...bxc4

Wasting no time in opening the queenside. Black can also play in more reserved fashion and 8...d6 was preferred in P.Cramling-G.Hertneck, Dortmund 1986. Now I'm not sure that White had to immediately force the pace with 9 f3, and instead 9 e3!? bxc4 10 Bxc4 doesn't look like a bad alternative. The game will hinge on whether Black's advanced kingside is a strength or a weakness, but a line like 10...h5 11 h4!? Nxg3 12 fxg3 g4 13 Ne2 Nd7 14 Nf4 Ne5 15 0-0 suggests that White should not be unhappy: after all, Black's pawns cannot move backwards!

### 9 e3 (Diagram 56)

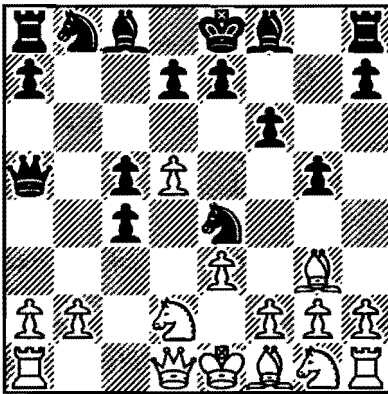


Diagram 56 (B)

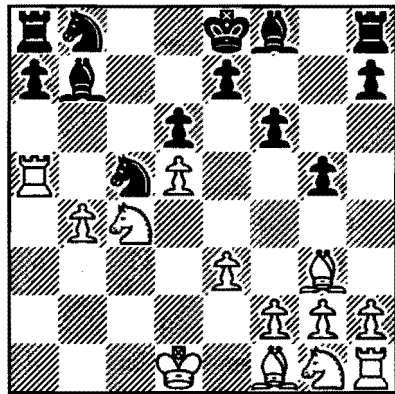


Diagram 57 (B)

### 9...c3

Once again I'm not convinced by the attempt to hang on to the c4-pawn with 9...Ba6. Following 10 Bc7! Qxc7 11 Nxe4 Qe5 (or 11...Qb6 12 Rc1!? Qxb2 13 Bxc4 Bxc4 14 Rxc4 d6 15 Ne2 Nd7 16 0-0 Rb8 17 Ra4 Rb7 18 N2c3 with good light-square compensation for the pawn) 12 Nc3 Bg7 13 Qa4 the pawn will fall in any case, after which White will complete his development with Ne2-g3.

### **10 Nc4 Qb4 11 a3 c2+**

Simplifying, but now White's position is definitely the easier to play. However, neither does 11...Qb7 12 bxc3 Nxc3 fully solve Black's problems, not least because of the cute tactic 13 Qh5+ (13 Qd3!? Nxd5 14 Be2 is also tempting; White enjoys a large lead in development here) 13...Kd8 14 Qf7 Qxd5? 15 Nd6!, graphically highlighting the downside to 6...g5 and revealing the h8-rook to be a tactical liability.

### **12 axb4 cxd1Q+ 13 Kxd1 Bb7 14 bxc5 Nxc5**

Perhaps 14...Bxd5!? is a better try, although with 15 f3!? White prepares 15...Nxc5 16 b4 Ne6 17 e4, when he enjoys both the initiative and strong queenside pressure for the pawn.

### **15 Ra5! d6 16 b4 (Diagram 57)**

White has seized the initiative and after 16...Ne4 17 Ne2 f5 18 f3 Nf6 19 Nc3 there was no doubting his advantage in G.Flear-J.Plachetka, Metz 1984.

5...Qa5+ 6 Nd2 g5!? is quite a critical choice, and one beloved by theory. However, even against an opponent with a good memory I hope that the new ideas mentioned here (10 Qc2!? after 7...f6, and the option of 8 Bc3!? as an alternative to 8 Bg3 after 7...Rg8) will keep Black on his toes, not least due to his long-term problem: just where does his king belong?

## Conclusion

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4 Bg5 has not been too popular against the Benko of late, but I'm not sure why and hope that things will change! This Trompowsky-like move should especially appeal to free spirits and, as we've seen, it's not easy for Black to develop along standard Benko lines, at least not without giving White a pleasant edge as happened in Grivas-Koerholz.

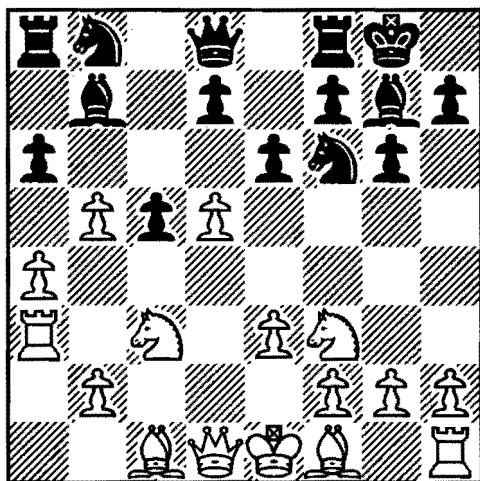
Even when Black meets 4 Bg5 with one of his better variations (the solid 4...bxc4 or the adventurous 4...Ne4 5 Bf4 Qa5+ 6 Nd2 g5!?), he is still likely to be somewhat less at home than a well-prepared white player. Finally, there's the fun factor: it's never nice to defend as Black when the opponent is orchestrating the early mayhem.

## Chapter Twelve

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# Central Control

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 g6 6 Nc3 Bg7 7 a4 0-0 8 Ra3 Bb7! 9 Nf3 e6! (Diagram 1)**



**Diagram 1 (W)**

The 5 e3 variation was very fashionable in the early nineties and is still played fairly often at club level. White's aim is to keep hold of his extra pawn and to develop. As the advance with e4-e5 is not threatened, Black should omit ...d6, preferring to de-

velop his kingside quickly and then strike in the centre with ...e6 before White can complete his development. With his centre under fire, White will have to make some concessions to complete his development, such as with Ra3 in the main line, and that often allows Black to take over the centre and to gain the initiative.

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□ K.Georgiev ■ I.Rogers

Biel Interzonal 1993

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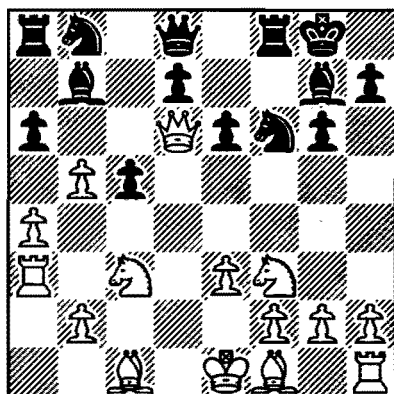
**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 g6 6 Nc3 Bg7 7 a4 0-0 8 Ra3**

This prophylactic move has also been employed by both Azmaiparashvili and Piket. White prepares to recapture on b5 with his a-pawn, but he might well prefer the simpler 8 Nf3, which we will explore in some detail below.

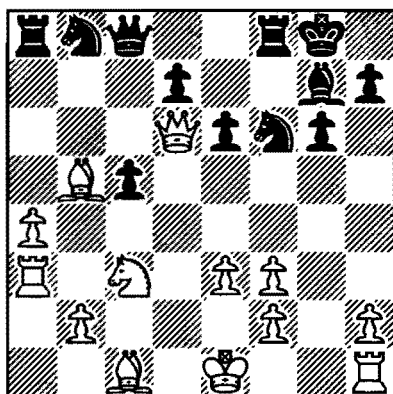
**8...Bb7 9 Nf3 e6**

Rogers responds by implementing our key plan: blasting open the centre.

**10 dxe6 fxe6 11 Qd6 (Diagram 2)**



**Diagram 2 (B)**



**Diagram 3 (W)**

**11...Qc8**

Not the only approach. Indeed, the less popular 11...axb5!? is probably better, intending 12 Bxb5 (12 axb5 Rxa3 13 bxa3 Qa5 14 Qd2 Bxf3 15 gxf3 d5 gives Black easily enough compensation) 12...Bxf3 13 gxf3 Qc8 (**Diagram 3**).



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** We have reached a position in which White has an extra pawn and the two bishops, but his pieces do not combine well, his king is unsafe and he has a crippled pawn structure. Indeed, I would certainly take Black here.

Following the 14 h4 (White never really gets any attack on the kingside after this so perhaps 14 0-0 is better, even though Black was doing well after 14...Ne8 15 Qg3 Nc6 16 Ne4 Ne5 17 f4 Nf7 in M.Petursson-J.Fedorowicz, Reykjavik 1990) 14...Rf7! (with the idea of ...c4 and ...Bf8) 15 Rg1 c4 16 Ne4!? (or 16 Ra1 Ne8 17 Qd2 d5 and Black has all the trumps in the position) 16...Nxe4 17 fxe4 of R.Markus-B.Vuckovic, Serbian Team Championship 2006, Black could have gained a clear advantage by taking the exchange with 17...Bf8.

## 12 Be2

Instead 12 bxa6?! Nxa6 13 Bb5 Nc7 14 Bd3 Nce8 15 Qg3 c4, freeing the c5-square for the queen, gave Black a pleasant advantage in C.Maruejols-D.Collas, Toulon 1999.

## 12...axb5 (Diagram 4)

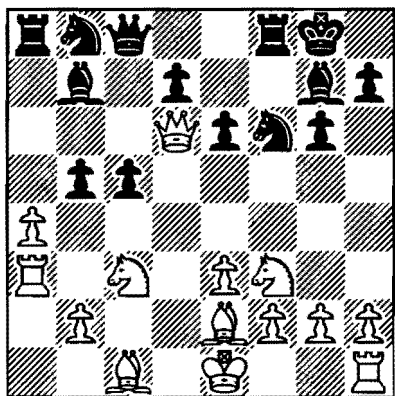


Diagram 4 (W)

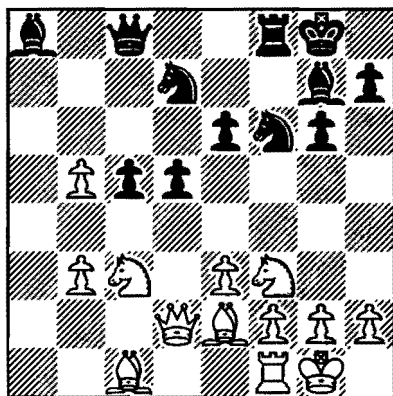


Diagram 5 (W)

Not the only approach and 12...Ne8 also seems quite playable:

- 13 Qd1 d5 14 0-0 Nd6 15 h4?! (an odd mix of plans: White has weakened his kingside, and h5 is hardly a threat) 15...axb5 16 Nxb5 Nf5 was promising for Black in S.Markeluk-S.Giardelli, Buenos Aires 1990.
- 13 Qd2 d5 14 0-0 Nd7 15 b3 Nd6 16 Bb2 Rf5 17 bxa6 Bxa6 was unclear in I.Jelen-V.Baklan, Groningen 1996.
- 13 Qg3 forces Black to be careful.



**BEWARE!** Expanding with 13...d5?! is inaccurate as it allows White to target the weakened e6-pawn. After 14 0-0 Nd7 15 Qh3 Rf6 16 e4 White was clearly better in D.Bлагоjevic-B.Stanojevic, Herceg Novi 2005.

Correct is 13...axb5! when White cannot recapture with the pawn as c3 would be hanging, and after 14 Nxb5 (14 Bxb5 transposes to the note to White's 13th move, below) 14...Nc6 15 0-0 Ne7 the position was quite unclear in L.Gofshtein-S.Drazic, Bratto 1998.

### **13 axb5!**

The point behind 8 Ra3: White keeps Black's knight stuck on b8, while keeping f3 defended. 13 Bxb5 is inferior as will become especially clear during a study of Line A, below. Here Ra3 turns out to be a waste of a move and so Black stands very well. After 13...Ne8 14 Qg3 Bxf3 15 gxf3 Nc6 16 0-0 d5 17 Rd1 c4 White's kingside had been compromised, his pieces were out of play, in particular the queen on g3 and the rook on a3, and Black's central pawns dominated the position in G.Hertneck-R.Mainka, German League 1992.

### **13...Ne8 14 Qd2 d5**

An interesting position has arisen. White has an extra pawn which is not easy to regain, but Black has good central control, the better structure and decent squares for his pieces. Overall, I think that the chances are roughly balanced.

### **15 Rxa8 Bxa8 16 0-0 Nd7!?**

Deviating from an earlier game which had seen 16...Qb7 17 b3 Nd7 18 Ba3 Nc7?! (the superior 18...Nd6 would have maintained rough equality) 19 Na4! Nxb5 20 Nxc5 Nxc5 21 Bxc5 Rc8 22 b4 e5 23 Ra1 and White was better in H.Schussler-So.Polgar, Vejstrup 1989.

### **17 b3 Nef6 (Diagram 5)**

By covering the d5-pawn, Black prepares to advance his e-pawn. However, this isn't the only approach and 17...Nd6!? looks like a reasonable alternative, putting pressure on the b5-pawn and giving Black ideas of ...Nd7-f6-e4.

### **18 Bb2**

Here Rogers has suggested 18 Ba3!? as an improvement. Indeed, after 18...Qb8 19 Na4 Ne4 20 Qc2 Rc8 21 Bd3 (Ambroz) White is slightly better, but of course Black has plenty of reasonable ways to deviate earlier on.

### **18...e5 19 Na4 Qb8 20 Qc2 Ne4**

Black's centre looks imposing, while his knights defend the vulnerable c5-pawn. Therefore White tries to exchange the strong knight on e4. Rogers criticizes White's next move, but I don't think that it is so bad.

### **21 Nd2**

Alternatively, 21 Bd3 Nd6 22 Nxc5?! Nxc5 23 Qxc5 Rc8! (23...e4 24 Bxg7 Kxg7 25 Qd4+ Kg8 26 Ne5 isn't so clear) 24 Qb4 e4 and Black's extra piece is stronger than White's additional pawns.

### **21...Nxd2 22 Qxd2 d4!?** (Diagram 6)

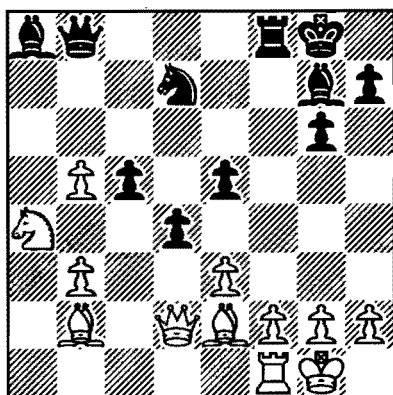


Diagram 6 (W)

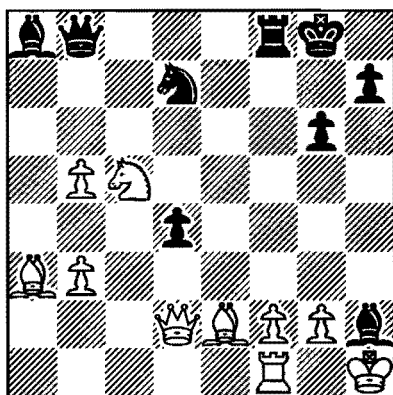


Diagram 7 (B)

Rogers concedes the c4-square, but opens up his light-squared bishop to rake White's kingside. Furthermore, Black now threatens 23...Qb7 24 f3 Bh6 when the pins would be difficult for White to handle.

### 23 exd4

23 f4!? was suggested by Rogers. After 23...Qd6 the position is highly unclear: Black has a spatial advantage, the superior pawn structure and the safer king; White, on the other hand, retains his extra pawn and is trying to dismantle Black's centre.

### 23...exd4!?

Sunder would have been 23...cxd4 with a good position for Black, but Rogers had seen the following combination and couldn't resist trying to carry it out!

### 24 Ba3 Be5! 25 Nxc5?

Georgiev misses Black's beautiful idea. Had White waded through the threats, Black would have had to be content with a draw as shown by the following fascinating line given by the Australian Grandmaster: 25 Bc4+ Kh8 26 Nxc5 Bxh2+ 27 Kh1 Rf5! 28 Nxd7 (28 f4 Bxf4 is unclear) 28...Rh5 29 Nxb8 Bg3+ 30 Kg1 Bh2+ and it's perpetual. White might also try for more with 25 Qd6!? (but not 25 h3? which loses in the same manner as the game), after which 25...Qd6 26 Nb2 Bf4 27 Qh3 Ne5 would have been far from clear.

### 25...Bxh2+ 26 Kh1 (Diagram 7) 26...Bxg2+!! 0-1

A spectacular finish. Black will force mate after 27 Kxg2 Rxf2+! 28 Kh1 (or 28 Rxf2 Qg3+) 28...Qa8+.

## Looking A Little Deeper

---

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 g6 6 Nc3

Note that 6 Nf3 Bg7 will transpose since White cannot avoid playing Nc3.

6...Bg7 (Diagram 8)

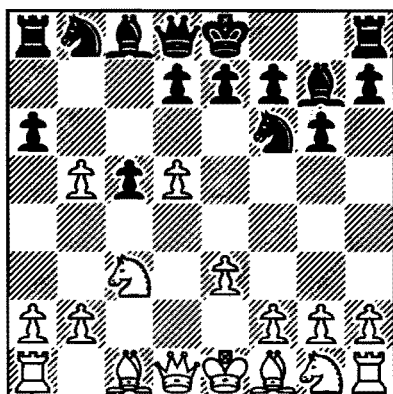


Diagram 8 (W)

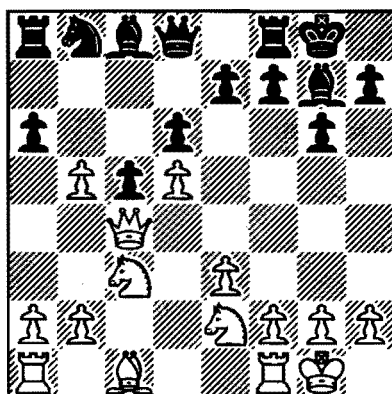


Diagram 9 (W)

White has employed a total of 15 different moves here! Fortunately for us this isn't a problem as Black can adopt the same plan against almost all of them. We will now chiefly focus on:

---

A: 7 a4

B: 7 e4

---



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** Black should be aware that White's most popular move is actually 7 Nf3, but after 7...0-0 play usually transposes to Line A following 8 a4.

We should also explore:

a) 7 bxa6 leads the game down typical Benko lines and is similar to Line B. Play might continue 7...0-0 8 Nf3 Qa5 9 Nd2 Bxa6 10 Bxa6 Qxa6 11 Qe2 d6 12 e4 Nbd7 13 Qxa6 Rxa6 14 Nc4 Ng4 15 0-0 Rb8 16 h3 Nge5 when Black had a typically promising Benko endgame in I.Borocz-V.Balogh, Budapest (rapid) 1996.

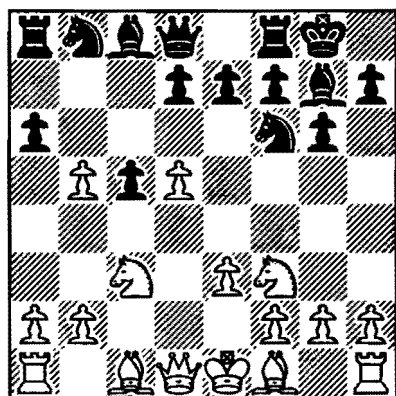
b) 7 d6!? is pretty double edged. White impedes Black's development, but loses another tempo in the process and will find it hard to defend his d-pawn in the



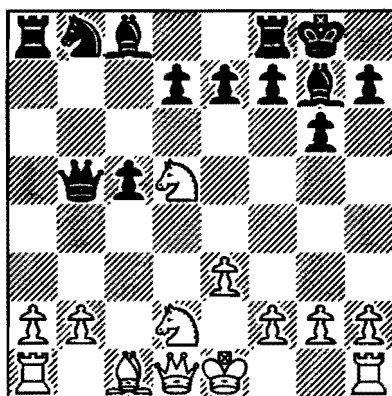
future. After 7...Bb7 8 Nf3 0-0 9 bxa6 Nxa6 10 Bc4 Nb4 11 0-0 e6 the position was rather unclear in H.Ree-A.Miles, Amsterdam 1981.

c) 7 Bc4 0-0 8 Nge2 (it is not clear that the knight is better here than on f3; 8 Nf3 would transpose to variation 'd1' below) 8...Ne8!? (the simple 8...d6 also looks to be okay for Black; one game continued 9 a4 Nbd7 10 0-0 Nb6 11 Ba2 axb5 12 axb5 Nfxd5! which was a neat tactic to utilize the pin down the a-file and after 13 Nxd5 Nxd5 14 Qxd5 Be6 15 Qe4 Bxa2 Black was much better in D.Pergericht-S.Conquest, London 1989) 9 0-0 Nd6 10 Qb3 Nxc4 11 Qxc4 d6 (**Diagram 9**) leaves Black with the two bishops and good play on the queenside. He quickly took the upper hand after 12 a4 Nd7 13 Ra3 Ne5 14 Qb3 Qa5 15 Ne4 Qb4! 16 Qxb4 cxb4 17 Rb3 Bb7 18 Nf4 a5!, trapping White's rook on b3 and leaving d5 very weak, in H.Hurne-D.Gurevich, Helsinki 1983.

d) 7 Nf3 0-0 (**Diagram 10**) and now as well as 8 a4, White has tried:



**Diagram 10 (W)**



**Diagram 11 (W)**

d1) 8 Bc4 axb5 (taking on b5 once White has moved his light-squared bishop makes sense, but 8...Ne8!? with the idea of gaining time on the c4-bishop looks interesting too; A.Graf-O.Salmensuu, Groningen 1999, continued 9 bxa6 Nd6 10 Be2 Bxa6 11 0-0 Qa5 12 e4 and here 12...Bxc3 13 bxc3 Nxe4 would have led to a highly unclear position) 9 Bxb5 Qa5 10 Nd2 (or 10 0-0 Ne4 11 Nxe4 Qxb5 12 Nc3 Qb6 which reached a normal Benko position where Black's bishop-pair and queenside play gave him full compensation in H.Rubio Purrinos-V.Tukmakov, Zaragoza 1993) 10...Nxd5!? 11 Nxd5 Qxb5 (**Diagram 11**) 12 Nxe7+ (or 12 Nc7 Qb7 13 Nxa8 Qxg2 14 Qf3 Qxf3 15 Nxf3 Bb7 when Black's bishop-pair and extra pawn outweigh White's extra exchange) 12...Kh8 13 Nxc8 Rxc8 14 Qe2 c4 15 0-0 d5 gave Black full compensation for the pawn in Y.Razuvaev-R.Vaganian, Moscow 1982.

d2) 8 Be2 axb5 transposes to variation 'd1' in the event of 9 Bxb5, while 9 Nxb5

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Bb7 10 Nc3 e6 11 e4 exd5 12 exd5 d6 gives Black typical compensation against the weak d5-pawn. It may appear at first that White is better, but he will have to go to great lengths in order to protect the pawn after Black's re-routing plan of ...Nbd7-b6 and possibly ...Ra6 and ...Qa8. Black can also target White's a- and b-pawns and use the c4-square for his bishop or knight. F.Portisch-L.Vajda, Balatonbereny 1996, continued 13 0-0 Nbd7 14 Ne1 Nb6 15 Bf3 Ba6 16 Nd3 and now 16...Qd7 would have left Black very comfortably placed.

### A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 g6 6 Nc3 Bg7 7 a4 0-0 8 Nf3

We have already covered 8 Ra3 e6 9 Nf3 Bb7 10 dxe6 fxe6 11 Qd6 Qc8 12 Be2 in Georgiev-Rogers. Instead in I.Danilov-C.Navrotescu, Romanian Championship, Baile Tusnad 2001, White came up with the horribly ambitious 12 b4?? and after 12...cxb4 13 Qxb4 Nd5 was forced to resign!

White might also invest a tempo with 8 e4, which transposes to Line B.

### 8...Bb7 (Diagram 12)

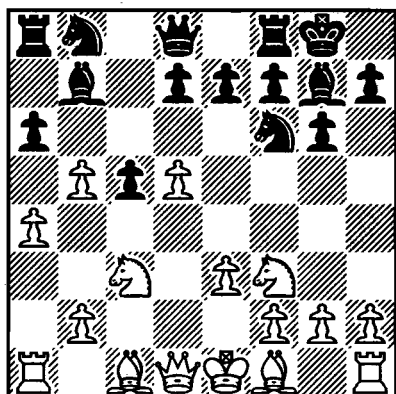


Diagram 12 (W)

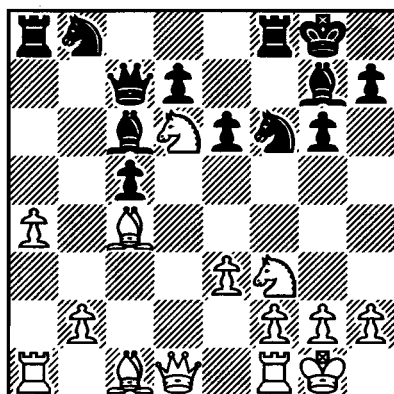


Diagram 13 (W)

### 9 Be2

Now the bishop will have to move again. White has also tried:

a) 9 bxa6 makes sense after Black has moved his bishop and was recommended in some old issues of *Chess Informant*, but has not been played recently. Following 9...Nxa6 10 Bc4 Ne8 11 0-0 Nd6 12 Bd3 (or 12 Be2 when I think that Black's best move might be the rash looking 12...f5!, stopping White from playing e4 to reinforce the d5-pawn; after 13 Nb5 Qb8 14 Bd2 Bxd5 15 Bc3 e6 16 Nxd6 a draw was agreed in this unclear position in B.Gulko-S.Kishnev, Moscow 1984) 12...Nb4 13 Bb1 Bxc3! 14 bxc3 Nxd5 15 Qc2 Qa5 16 Ne5 (I.Jelen-N.Andrianov, Cannes 1995),

Stohl has recommended 16...c4! when Black has good attacking chances.

b) 9 Bc4 is similar to 8 Bc4. Again Black has a choice of moves, the main options being 9...axb5 and 9...Ne8. I think I would choose the former which is likely to transpose to our main line here with 9 Be2: 9...axb5 10 Nxb5 (10 Bxb5 transposes to the main line) 10...e6! (strangely only 10...d6 seems to have been played; perhaps Black has been afraid of allowing White's knight into the d6-square, but this doesn't appear to be a problem) 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 Nd6 Bc6 13 0-0 Qc7! (**Diagram 13**) sees Black threaten 14...Bxa4 and I cannot see a good defence for White, especially as 14 Nb5 seems rather depressing to have to play.

c) 9 Ra3 e6 10 d6 has been played a handful of times. Black's most sensible reaction appears to be 10...axb5 11 Bxb5 Qb6! which was first played back in 1980. Against most moves Black will simply play 12...Ne8 and regain the pawn. Thus White has tried 12 Rb3, but Black held at least equality after 12...Nc6 13 Nd2 (or 13 0-0 Na5 14 Ra3 Ne8 15 Bxd7 Nxd6 with good compensation for the pawn) 13...Na5 14 Nc4 Nxc4 15 Bxc4 Qc6 16 f3 Ba6 17 Bb5 Bxb5 18 axb5 Qb6 19 0-0 Rfd8 (even better is the immediate 19...Ne8!) 20 Ra3 when a draw was agreed in J.Sieglen-Meier, Württemberg 1980, although Black is better after 20...Ne8.

d) 9 Rb1 has been played around 20 times in my database, but seems illogical compared to 9 Ra3. White moves his rook off the a-file, enabling him to recapture on b5 with the a-pawn while threatening to play b4 at some point, but the rook can run into problems on b1: 9...e6 10 dxe6 (10 Bc4 axb5 11 axb5 exd5 12 Nxd5 Nxd5 13 Bxd5 Qa5+ 14 Bd2 Qxb5 15 Bxb7 Qxb7 gave Black a comfortable position in T.Hillarp Persson-M.Nedobora, Mondariz 1994) 10...fxe6 11 Be2 (11 Qd6 axb5 12 axb5 Be4! highlights the drawback to 9 Rb1 and after 13 Nxe4 Nxe4 14 Qd1 d5 Black is better) 11...axb5 12 axb5 Ne4! (**Diagram 14**).

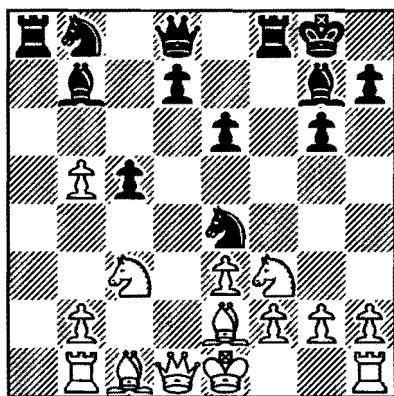


Diagram 14 (W)

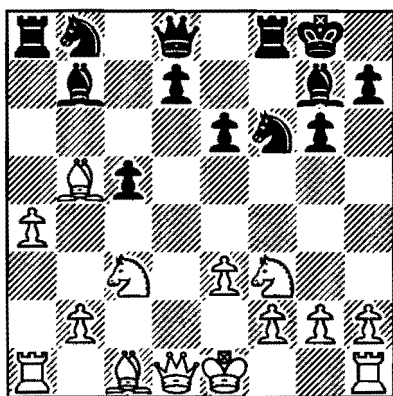


Diagram 15 (W)

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Black immediately highlights the drawback to White's 9th and now we have:

d1) 13 Qc2 Ng5!? (attacking White's kingside like this looks strong; that said, 13...Qa5 14 Bd2 Nxd2 15 Qxd2 d5 is also a decent option) 14 e4 Bxc3+!? (or 14...Nxf3+ 15 Bxf3 d5 which is unclear) 15 bxc3 (15 Qxc3 Nxe4) 15...Bxe4 16 Bxg5 Bxc2 17 Bxd8 Bxb1 18 Be7 Rf5 looks a little better for Black.

d2) 13 Bd2 d5!? (again 13...Ng5 can be considered and 14 h4 Nxf3+ 15 Bxf3 Bxf3 16 gxf3 d5 17 f4 d4 18 Ne4 Qd5 19 Qf3 Nd7 20 Ng5 Qxf3 21 Nxf3 Rfb8 was slightly preferable for Black in Z.Szabo-Mi.Tseitlin, Budapest 1994) 14 0-0 (14 Nxe4 dxe4 15 Ng1 Qg5 16 Bf1 does not look attractive for White, but Black needs to strike quickly, such as with 16...Nd7 17 Nh3 Qf5 18 Bc3 Ne5 19 Bxe5 Bxe5 20 Be2 Bc7, reaching a rather unbalanced position) 14...d4 (this move wins the exchange, but gives White some chances; instead after 14...Nxd2! 15 Qxd2 Nd7 Black was better in S.Barbeau-B.Hartman, Comeau 1987) 15 exd4 cxd4 16 Nxe4 Bxe4 17 Qb3 Bxb1 18 Rxb1 gave White sufficient play for the exchange and was rather unclear in the recent game G.Morrison-G.Jones, British League 2008.

Returning to 9 Be2:

### 9...axb5

Black has delayed this exchange up until now, not wanting to allow White to gain a tempo developing his light-squared bishop. However, now that the bishop has moved and with there not being a rook on a3, it is time to open up the position.

### 10 Bxb5 e6!

Attacking the d-pawn and forcing White to make a concession.

### 11 dxe6

Alternatively:

a) 11 e4 exd5 12 exd5 (12 e5 Ng4 13 Nxd5 Nxe5 regains the pawn with equality) 12...Re8+ 13 Kf1?! (13 Be3 looks essential, but Black should be fine after 13...Ng4 14 Qd2 Nxe3 15 fxe3 Qe7 16 0-0 Qxe3+ 17 Qxe3 Rxe3) 13...Na6 14 Bf4 Nb4 15 Bc4 Ne4 saw Black take over the initiative and gain a clear advantage in P.Sinkovics-J.Bellon Lopez, Biel 1991.

b) 11 Bc4 Na6 12 0-0 Nb4 13 e4 exd5 14 exd5 Re8 15 Bg5 h6 16 Be3 d6 was unclear in M.Lomineishvili-T.Kostiuk, Chisinau 2005. Black has adequate compensation here due to the weak white d5- and b2-pawns, his active rooks and his use of the e4-square.

### 11...fxe6 (Diagram 15) 12 Qd6!?

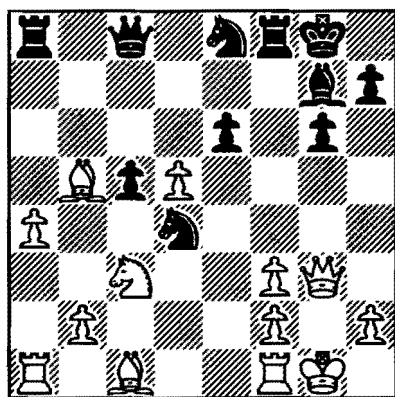
White tries to disturb Black's planned expansion. The d6-square looks like a useful outpost, but Black can kick the queen away if he wishes. That said, 12 0-0 d5 leaves Black with very good compensation: he has a handy central pawn mass and good squares for all his pieces. The game Xu Jun-Wang Zili, China 1996, continued 13 Ne2 Ne4! 14 Ng3 and here Black would have been doing very well after 14...Nxc3 15 hxc3 Bc6 16 Bxc6 Nxc6 when White would have found it difficult to

defend his queenside pawns.

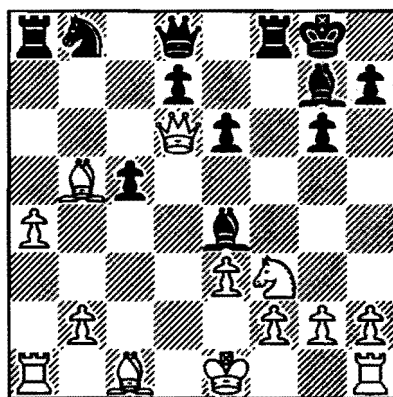
### 12...Ne4!?

A logical move. Black forces the exchange of knights and opens up an attack against the knight on f3. He can also consider:

a) 12...Qc8 is Black's other main move, defending c5. After 13 0-0 (13 Ra3 transposes to the note to White's 13th move in Georgiev-Rogers) 13...Ne8 Black expels the White queen and 14 Qg3 (superior to 14 Qd3 Nc7 15 Bc4? d5 16 Ba2 Ba6 17 Nb5 Qd7 18 Rd1 Nxb5 19 axb5 Bxb5 20 Qc2 c4 21 Qd2 Nc6 22 e4 d4 23 Qg5 Nb4 24 Ne5 Qe8 25 Nxc4 Bxc4 and 0-1 which was a complete disaster for White in C.Peters-L.Gyorkos, Budapest 1991) 14...Bxf3 15 gxf3 d5 (15...Nc6 transposes to note 'b') 16 e4 Nc6!? (not the only approach; indeed, after 16...Nc7 I would prefer to be Black) 17 exd5 Nd4 (**Diagram 16**) wasn't at all clear in E.Torre-R.Vaganian, London 1984.



**Diagram 16 (W)**



**Diagram 17 (W)**

b) 12...Bxf3!? 13 gxf3 Qc8 also deserves attention. Following 14 Be2 Ne8 15 Qg3 Nc6 16 f4 d5 a premature draw was agreed in T.Thorhallsson-J.Gunnarsson, Icelandic Championship, Reykjavik 1999. I think Black that stands better here due to his superior structure, much better coordination and somewhat safer king position.

### 13 Nxe4 Bxe4 (Diagram 17) 14 0-0

Even Korchnoi has decided that it's too risky to grab another pawn here. Indeed, White has only grabbed the pawn in one game: K.Schlenga-G.Hertneck, Dortmund 1988, continued 14 Qxc5 Nc6 (Black can also consider 14...Rf5!? 15 Qb4 Bxf3 16 gxf3 Nc6 when 17 Qb3 Ne5 18 f4 Nf3+ 19 Ke2 Rxf4 is unclear, while I prefer Black's chances after 17 Bxc6 dxc6 as White's position is a bit of a wreck) 15 Bxc6?!

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

(15 Qd6 looks like a better try) 15...Bxc6 16 Nd4 Bxg2 17 Rg1 Bd5 18 Qd6 Qc8 19 Bd2 Ra6 20 Qg3 e5 21 Rc1 Qb7 22 Nb5 and now Black would have had an insurmountable advantage after 22...Rxa4.

I should also mention 14 Be2 Nc6 15 0-0 which was agreed drawn in C.Lutz-J.Plachetka, Rimavska Sobota 1991. Evidently the higher-rated white player wasn't happy with his position. Black has at least a draw here with 15...Bxf3 16 Bxf3 Rxf3 17 gxf3 Be5 18 Qd1 (it's also perpetual after 18 Qxc5 Qg5+ 19 Kh1 Qh5 20 f4 Qf3+) 18...Bxh2+, and can also play for more with 15...Rf5!?

### 14...Bxf3!

Instead 14...Rf5 did not work out well for Black in L.Alburt-M.Hebden, New York 1983, but the move itself does not look so bad. The game concluded 15 Rd1 Qf6?! (15...Bxf3 is probably necessary) 16 Nd2 Rd5?? 17 Nxe4 and 1-0 which must have been rather embarrassing for the English Grandmaster.

### 15 gxf3 Rxf3 (Diagram 18)

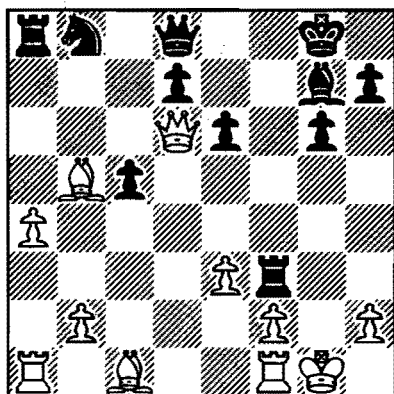


Diagram 18 (W)

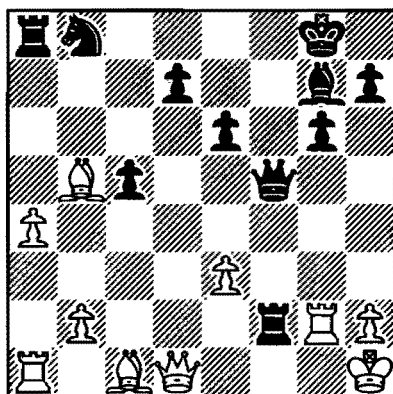


Diagram 19 (B)

### 16 Qd1?

Extremely ambitious. So too is 16 Qxc5? when 16...Rf5! 17 Qc4 Qg5+ 18 Kh1 Rxb5! is a pretty tactic which White has to watch out for. Perhaps best is 16 Kg2 (16 Be2 expels the rook, but Black has the better chances after 16...Rf5) when 16...Qg5+ (Black can also consider the more ambitious 16...Rf7!?) 17 Kxf3 Be5 18 Qd1 Qh5+ 19 Kg2 Qxh2+ 20 Kf3 Qh5+ results in perpetual check.

### 16...Qg5+ 17 Kh1 Qf5

Now White is in trouble.

### 18 Rg1!

A forced move. White sacrifices the f2-pawn so that he can defend h2 adequately. Instead 18 Qe2?? Be5 would have left White unable to stop the mate threats on h2.

### 18...Rxf2

Black is a pawn up and White still has an exposed king.

### 19 Rg2 (Diagram 19)

We've been following the game V.Korchnoi-G.Jones, Gibraltar 2007. Now I hurried with 19...Bxb2?, but after 20 Rxf2 Qe4+ 21 Kg1 Bxa1 22 Ba3 White was right back in the game which was later drawn. Instead the simple 19...Rxg2 20 Kxg2 d5 would have left Black with a very pleasant position indeed.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** If no lesser player than Korchnoi can get into trouble on the kingside in this line, just think how the average club-player will struggle as White!

### B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 e3 g6 6 Nc3 Bg7 7 e4!? (Diagram 20)

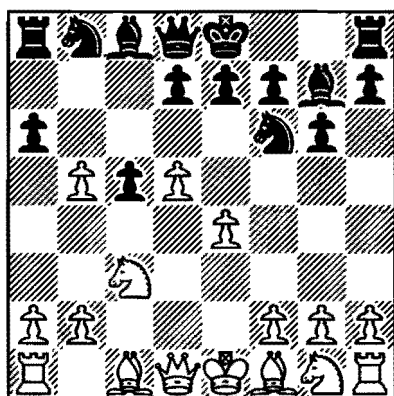


Diagram 20 (B)

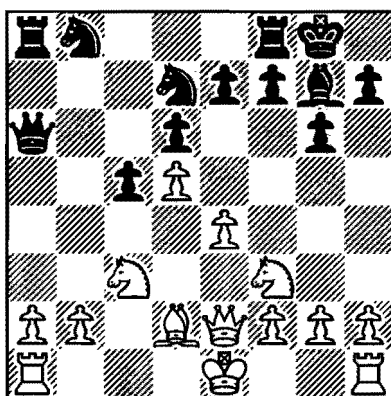


Diagram 21 (W)

White spends two tempi to play e4, but has managed to avoid dislodging his king as in the main line (1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 bxa6 g6 6 Nc3 Bxa6 7 e4 Bxf1 8 Kxf1).

### 7...0-0!

As we will see, the e5-break is not a serious threat and so Black can avoid ...d6 and play an immediate ...e6 as in the previous lines. 7...d6 has been played more often, but I think that White achieves a good game: for example, 8 Nf3 0-0 9 a4 Bb7 10 Be2 axb5 11 Bxb5 e6 12 dxe6 fxe6 13 e5! with advantage in I.Glek-A.Vaisser, European Championship, Ohrid 2001.

## 8 a4

Playing as in Line A, but White has also tried:

a) 8 bxa6 d6 9 Nf3 Qa5 10 Bd2 Bxa6 11 Bxa6 Qxa6 12 Qe2 Nfd7 (**Diagram 21**) 13 Rb1 (the queenless middlegame after 13 Qxa6 Nxa6 is okay for Black: he has typical Benko compensation on the queenside and can play for the ...e6 and ...f5 breaks) 13...Rc8 14 0-0 Qxe2 15 Nxe2 Rxa2 regained the pawn with advantage in P.Motwani-M.Hebden, London 1982.

b) The ambitious 8 e5 has only been played once as far as I can see. After 8...Ne8 we have:

b1) 9 Nf3 d6 (attacking the overextended centre) 10 exd6 exd6 (10...Nxd6!? looks sensible, redeveloping the knight when Black seems to be doing well) 11 Bg5 Nf6 12 Be2 h6 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 0-0 axb5 15 Bxb5 Bg4 was dynamically balanced in J.Campos Moreno-J.Bellon Lopez, Barcelona 1990.

b2) 9 d6 is suggested by Fritz, based on purely tactical grounds, but a thorough examination reveals that Black is doing well: 9...exd6 10 Qd5!? (10 exd6 Qa5 leaves White far too overextended and behind in development) 10...Nc7 11 Qf3 (or 11 Qxd6 Bxe5!) 11...d5 12 Nxd5 (after 12 b6 Ne6 13 Nxd5 Nc6 the e5-pawn is dropping, leaving Black ahead in development, while the b6-pawn is definitely more of a weakness than a strength) 12...Nxb5 13 Nf6+ (13 Bxb5 axb5 14 Nf6+ Bxf6 15 Qxa8 Bxe5 is perhaps a slight improvement for White, but is still unappealing) 13...Bxf6 14 Qxa8 Bxe5 (**Diagram 22**) leaves Black with a clear advantage. In return for the exchange Black has a pawn, while White's only developed piece is his queen which is stuck in the corner. Indeed, I believe that in practical terms Black is close to winning.

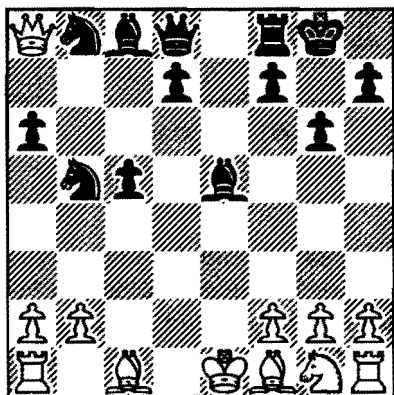


Diagram 22 (W)

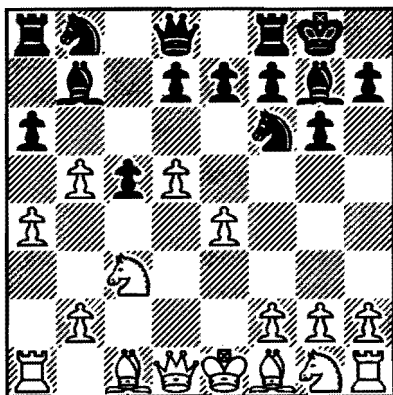


Diagram 23 (W)



c) After 8 Nf3 axb5 9 Bxb5 Nxe4 10 Nxe4 Qa5+ 11 Nc3 Bxc3+ 12 bxc3 Qxb5 Black had regained the pawn with rough equality, while White's king was stuck in the centre in O.Dzuban-T.Giorgadze, USSR Team Championship 1979.

### 8...Bb7 (Diagram 23)

Black continues to ignore the threat of e5 and plans to again play ...e6.

### 9 e5

White decides that it's time to push back the black knight. 9 Nf3 is also possible, of course, and has been the main move chosen in practice. After 9...e6 we have:

a) 10 Be3 exd5 11 exd5 (or 11 e5 d4!) 11...Re8 (Black also has 11...Qa5!? when the 12 Bd2 of N.Rashkovsky-A.Vaisser, Barnaul 1984, can be met by 12...Re8+ 13 Be2 axb5 14 Nxb5 Qb6 which looks good for Black; White does better here with the critical 12 Bxc5, after which 12...Nxd5 13 Bxf8 Nxc3 14 bxc3 Qxc3+ 15 Nd2 Bxf8! should give Black enough for the exchange) 12 bxa6 Nxa6 (Diagram 24) 13 Be2 and now 13...Nb4 should be absolutely okay for Black, but in A.Keatinge Clay-A.Lee, San Francisco 2000, he preferred an enterprising exchange sacrifice on e3, further weakening the white structure, albeit at some cost in terms of material.

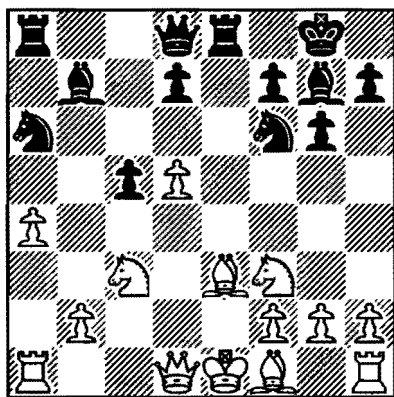


Diagram 24 (W)

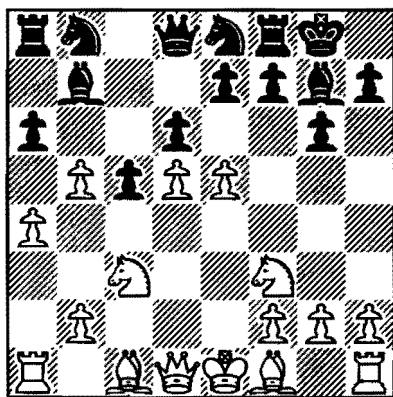


Diagram 25 (W)

b) 10 Rb1?! exd5 11 exd5 axb5 12 axb5 d6 13 Bc4 Re8+ 14 Kf1 Nbd7 left White's position a wreck in G.Agzamov-R.Vaganian, Yerevan 1982. White's pawn structure is in ruins, his king has been misplaced and it will take him a while to develop his h1-rook. In the meantime his d5 pawn is doomed, since Black will play ...Nb6, ...Ra7 and ...Qa8.

c) 10 dxe6 has been played very rarely. One game saw 10...fxe6 11 Bg5 Qa5 12 Bd2 Qd8 (12...axb5!? is reasonable, to avoid the repetition) 13 Bg5 and here a draw was agreed in J.Pinter-L.Popov, European Team Championship, Skara 1980.

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

d) 10 Bc4 was played by Vladimir Kramnik against Gerald Hertneck in a blitz game back in 1994: 10...exd5 11 exd5 Re8+ 12 Be3 Ng4 (12...d6 was played by Hertneck: after 13 0-0 Nbd7 14 bxa6 Bxa6 15 Bxa6 Rxa6 16 h3 Nb6 17 Qd3 Qa8 18 Rfd1 Nxa4? 19 Qc4 Nxc3 20 Rxa6 Kramnik was much better, but 18...c4 19 Qc2 Nfxd5 20 Nxd5 Nxd5 would have been fine for Black) 13 0-0 Nxe3 (Black might also regain his pawn with 13...axb5!? 14 Bxb5 Rxe3! 15 fxe3 Nxe3 and 16...Nxf1) 14 fxe3 axb5 15 Nxb5 and now in M.Chandler-P.Littlewood, London 1986, it was time to regain the pawn on e3.

Returning to the aggressive 9 e5:

### 9...Ne8 10 Nf3 d6 (Diagram 25)

It's hard to tell whether the pawn on e5 is a benefit or a liability. On the plus side it has gained some space and forced Black to lose some time with his knight, but Black can now break open the centre and the pawn on d5 will then find itself rather vulnerable.

#### 11 Bf4

White does not want to take on d6 as that would leave Black with very easy play.

#### 11...Qa5!?

An active idea. Black tries to create some trouble with his queen. An earlier game by Vasilev went 11...axb5 12 Bxb5 Nd7 13 exd6 Nxd6! 14 0-0 Nxb5 15 axb5 Nb6 and Black had comfortably equalized in P.Cramling-M.Vasilev, Malaga 2000.

11...dxe5 also looks perfectly playable because the weakness of d5 outweighs the vulnerability of c5. I.Farago-A.Deze, Novi Sad 1979, continued 12 Bxe5 Nf6 13 Bc4 axb5 14 axb5 Nbd7 15 Rxa8 Qxa8 16 0-0 and now 16...Nb6!? would have been safe enough for Black.

#### 12 Be2 Qb4 (Diagram 26)

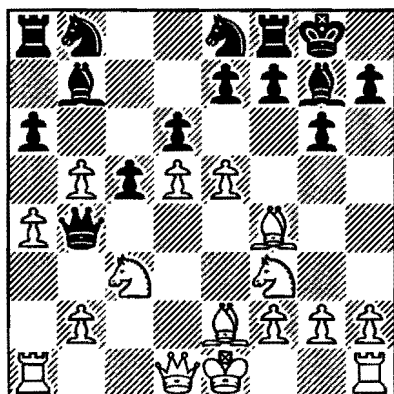


Diagram 26 (W)

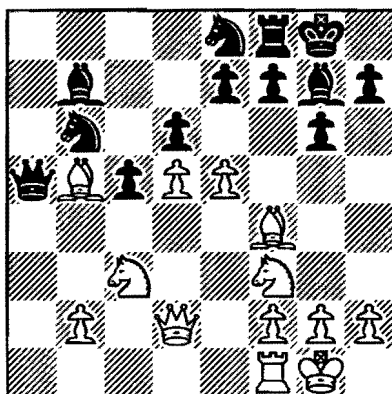


Diagram 27 (W)

**13 Qd2**

A logical move which defends both the bishop and b2, but perhaps Tisdall's suggestion of Bg5, on either this move or the next, was stronger. That said, 13 Bg5 f6 14 exf6 Nxf6 would still have been perfectly acceptable for Black.

**13...Nd7 14 a5?!**

Overambitious. White stops Black using the b6-square and forces an exchange on b5, but this gives Black another target to attack. Preferable was 14 Bg5 f6 15 exf6 (after 15 e6 Nb6 16 bxa6 Bxa6 17 Bxa6 fxg5! I would prefer to be Black: White's pawns look far too extended and Black will have a jolly time picking them off) 15...exf6 16 Bf4 axb5 17 Bxb5 Ne5 which would have remained rather unclear.

**14...axb5 15 Bxb5 Nb6!**

It turns out that 14 a5 didn't prevent ...Nb6 on account of the pin down the a-file!

**16 0-0 Rxa5 17 Rxa5 Qxa5 (Diagram 27)**

We've been following the game S.Estremera Panos-M.Vasilev, Cutro 2002, in which Black had won back his pawn, leaving the d5-pawn looking very vulnerable.

**Conclusion**

---

We have seen that even very strong grandmasters can struggle against Black's active idea, as indeed Georgiev did. Black's simple plan is surprisingly effective and takes White out of his comfort zone. The most critical line may well be 11 Qd6, as in Georgiev-Rogers, when I believe that 11...axb5 is the best move after which Black seems to be totally fine. If White is not careful he will find himself having lost all the positional battles for which his extra pawn will be scant compensation.

## Chapter Thirteen

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# Dark-Square Magic

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 e6 6 e4 c4!? (Diagram 1)

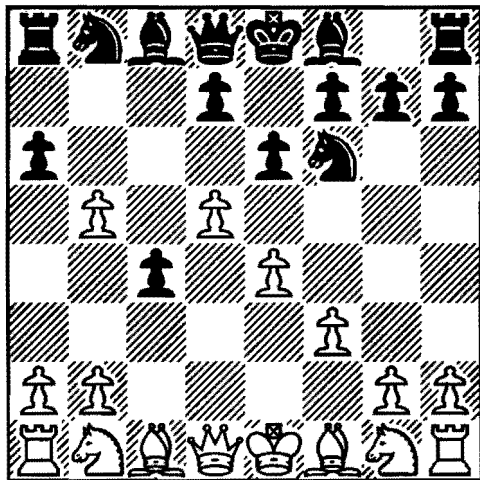


Diagram 1 (W)

With 5 f3 against the Benko, White gives back the sacrificed pawn to create a strong centre and to gain a space advantage. Black should be able to equalize with 5...axb5, but this gives White just what he wants. Instead 5...e6 gives the game a

double-edged quality, especially when followed up with the shocking 6 e4 c4!?. Instead of regaining the sacrificed pawn, Black gives another to open up the g1-a7 diagonal which 5 f3 weakened severely. White's pawns cannot move backwards and the f2- and e3-squares are going to be very vulnerable. Fewer than one hundred games have been played with this line, but it has been employed by such strong grandmasters as Pentala Harikrishna, Artur Kogan and Liviu Dieter Nisipeanu, and quickly leads to a lively game.

□ A.Jakab ■ B.Predojevic

Budapest 2004

1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 e6 (Diagram 2)

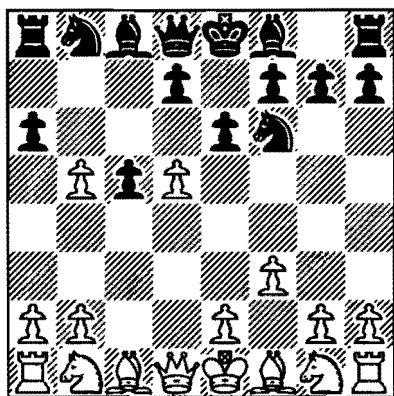


Diagram 2 (W)

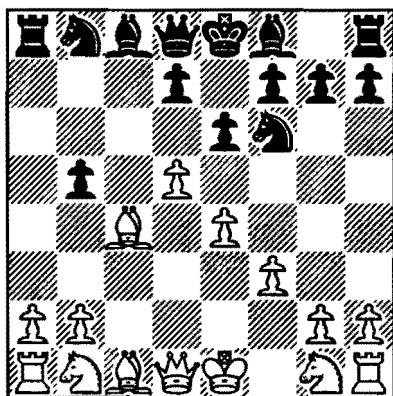


Diagram 3 (W)

6 e4

The only logical follow up, although 6 Nc3 has been played occasionally. After 6...exd5 7 Nxd5 Bb7 8 Bg5 (8 Nxf6+ Qxf6 9 e4 Bd6 threatens an awkward check on h4) 8...Bxd5 9 Bxf6 Qxf6 10 Qxd5 Qxb2 11 Qxa8 Qxa1+ 12 Kf2 Bd6 13 bxa6 0-0 Black enjoyed a strong attack on the dark squares in H.Knuth-T.Paethz, German Championship, Bad Wildbad 1993. I should also mention the variation 6 dxe6 fxe6 7 e3 d5 8 bxa6 Bd6 9 Bb5+ Bd7 (Chekhov) and again I quite like Black's activity.

6...c4!?

Black turns the game into a proper gambit, offering two pawns in his quest for the initiative. His counterplay may at first look nebulous, but he will grab the dark squares, in particular the g1-a7 diagonal, and prevent White from castling kingside. This coupled with quick queenside play should give Black enough compen-

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

sation. Instead the main line of the 5..e6 variation runs 6...exd5 7 e5 Qe7 8 Qe2 Ng8 9 Nc3 Bb7 10 Nh3 c4!?, resulting in a complicated position and one which is somewhat more theoretical than our choice.

### 7 Bxc4 axb5 (Diagram 3) 8 Bb3

White declines the second pawn, trying to limit Black's play. We shall examine the more greedy 8 Bxb5 in the Looking a Little Deeper section, below.

### 8...Bc5 9 Kf1?!

Jakab panics and tries to get his king to safety as quickly as possible, but 9 Ne2 seems more logical, as we will see. There's also 9 Nh3, as played by a young Vallejo Pons, but the knight looks better placed in the centre and Black achieved a good game after 9...0-0 10 Bg5 h6 11 Bh4 exd5 12 Bxd5 Qa5+ 13 Nc3 Nxd5 14 Qxd5 b4 in F.Vallejo Pons-O.De la Riva Aguado, Pamplona 1999.

### 9...0-0 10 g3 d6 11 Kg2

White has completed his goal, but finds himself a long way behind in development. Furthermore, he will discover that his king is not as safe on g2 as he had hoped.

### 11...exd5 12 exd5 Re8 (Diagram 4)

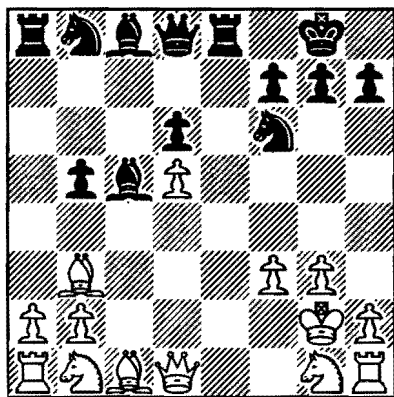


Diagram 4 (W)

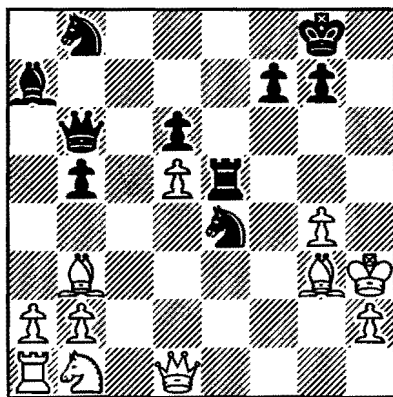


Diagram 5 (W)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Already Black has more than enough compensation for the pawn. His better-developed pieces are well placed to attack down both the e-file and the g1-a7 diagonal, and Black also enjoys much the safer king position.

### 13 Ne2 Ra7!

A pretty move which transfers the rook to the open e-file.

**14 Re1 Rae7 15 Bd2 Ba7!?**

Black continues in a direct manner by threatening to infiltrate on f2 after ...Qb6. Also strong was 15...Qd7 after which, for example, 16 Ng1 (White covers the h3-square to avoid a hopeless variation like 16 Nbc3 Qh3+ 17 Kh1 Bg4! 18 Ng1 Rxe1 19 Bxe1 Qf1 when Black wins) 16...Rxe1 17 Bxe1 Qf5 18 Nc3 b4 19 Na4 Bb7 leaves Black on top.

**16 Ng1 Rxe1 17 Bxe1 Qb6 18 Nh3 Bxh3+ 19 Kxh3 Re5**

White's position looks horrendous. His king is very exposed on h3 with all Black's pieces pointing towards it, while his own pieces are all on the back rank except the bishop on b3 which is rather out of play.

**20 g4 h5!**

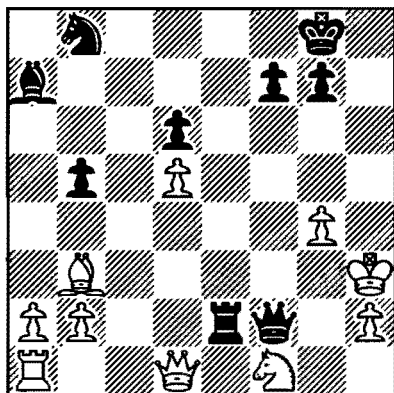
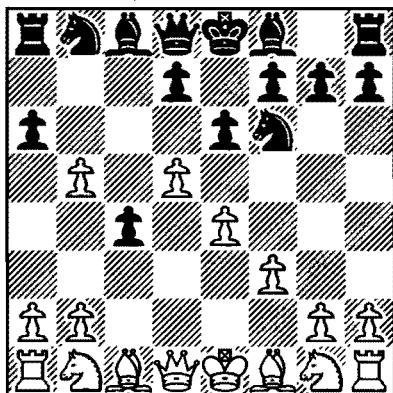
Energetically continuing to break down White's defences.

**21 Bg3**

Fritz initially wants to play 21 g5 here, but after 21...Rxc5 22 Bg3 h4 it accepts that Black is winning as 23 Bxh4 Rh5 sees White unable to retain the bishop on h4.

**21...hxcg4+ 22 fxg4 Ne4 (Diagram 5)**

Centralizing the knight and preparing to swap off the white king's only defender.

**Diagram 6 (W)****Diagram 7 (W)****23 Nd2**

Instead 23 Bxe5 was, of course, unplayable due to 23...Nf2+, but 23 Qc1 was White's only chance, covering the e3-square and tactically defending g4 (via the check on c8). However one feels that White shouldn't survive long in this position. Indeed following 23...Qd4! (a slightly mysterious move, which threatens to check on f2, whereas 23...Nf2+ allows White to escape with 24 Bxf2 Qxf2 25 Qc8+ Kh7 26

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Qc2+, swapping the queens) 24 Qc8+ (Black wins after 24 Nc3 Nf2+ 25 Bxf2 Qxf2 now that White doesn't have Qc8+) 24...Kh7 25 Bc2 (or 25 Nc3 Ng5+ when 26 Kg2 Qd3! 27 Rf1 Re2+! 28 Kh1 Re1! 29 Rxe1 Qf3 mate shows the full potential of the black pieces, while 26 Kh4 Nf3+ 27 Kh3 f5 is a pretty mating net: 28 gxf5 Ng5+ 29 Kg2 Qg4! and White cannot cover both h3 and f3) 25...f5 26 Bxe4 Qxe4 27 Nc3 Qxg4+ 28 Kg2 b4, White is forced to give up material to avert mate.

**23...Nf2+ 24 Bxf2 Qxf2 25 Nf1**

The only move to stop 25...Re3+, but now Black's rook invades elsewhere and with decisive effect.

**25...Re2 (Diagram 6) 26 Qd3 Qg2+ 27 Kh4 Bf2+ 28 Kg5 Re5+ 29 Kf4 g5 mate (0-1)**

Predojevic crowns a wonderful attacking game with a picturesque finish.

## Looking a Little Deeper

---

**1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 e6 6 e4 c4 (Diagram 7)**

White must now decide whether or not to accept the second pawn:

---

**A: 7 Bxc4**

**B: 7 Nc3**

---

Instead 7 dxe6?! fails to impress and Black has scored 7/8 from this position: for example, 7...fxe6 8 Bxc4 axb5 9 Bb3 Bc5 10 Nh3 0-0 11 Bg5 Nc6 12 Nc3 Qb6 13 Bh4 Ba6 14 Bf2 b4 gave Black very dangerous activity in L.Williams-I.Rees, Cardiff 2004.

**A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 e6 6 e4 c4 7 Bxc4 axb5**

We immediately encounter a further divide:

---

**A1: 8 Bxb5**

**A2: 8 Bb3**

---

Line A2 might appear the more prudent, but Black will gain good compensation in any case, as indeed we've already seen Predojevic demonstrate.

**A1) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 e6 6 e4 c4 7 Bxc4 axb5 8 Bxb5 Bc5 9 Nc3**

An alternative move order is 9 Ne2 0-0 10 Nbc3 when 10...Qb6 (10...Bb7 transposes to our main line) is the other main plan for Black, but is less accurate in my view. That said, a recent grandmaster game ran 11 Qb3 (11 Bg5 Ne8!? is also quite criti-



cal) 11...Na6 12 Bg5 Nc7 13 Bc4 Qa7 14 0-0-0 Ba6 15 Bxa6 Qxa6 16 Qc2 Rfb8 with some attacking prospects in S.Volkov-A.Iljushin, Russian Team Championship 2005.



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Note too the plausible trap 9 Bg5?? Qb6 when Black wins a piece on either b5 or g1.

9...Bb7!? (Diagram 8)

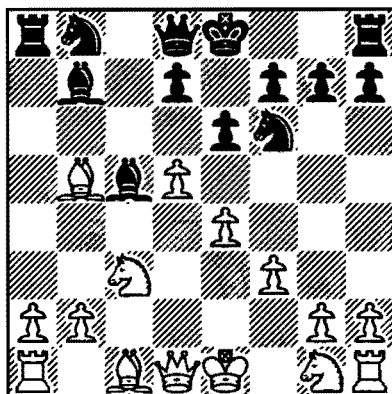


Diagram 8 (W)

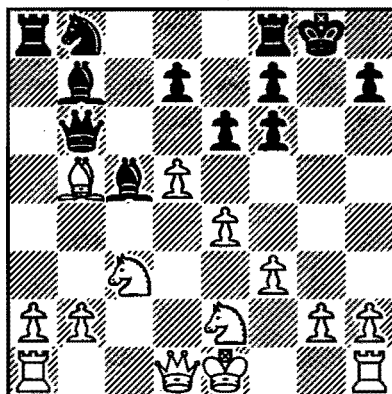


Diagram 9 (W)

What exactly does Black have for his pawns? Firstly, White's king is trapped in the centre for the time being and the dark squares around his king are weak, especially f2 and e3. Secondly, the pawn on d5 may be weak in some lines, and Black also has typical Benko compensation on the a- and b-files. Overall, I believe that Black has enough for the pawns, not to mention the more fun position to play.

#### 10 Nge2 0-0 11 d6

White tries to stop Black from opening the e-file. However, this move cedes the c6-square and the pawn on d6 may find itself vulnerable. We should thus examine the alternatives:

a) 11 Bg5 Qb6 and now:

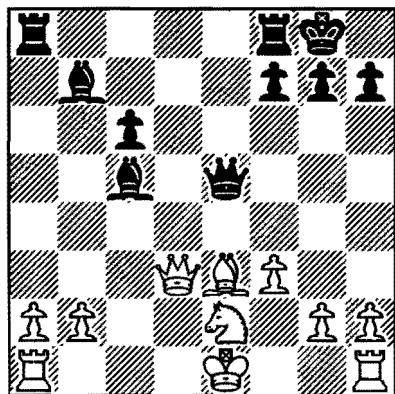
a1) 12 Qd2 exd5 13 e5 Ne8 14 a4 Nc7 15 b4 Bxb4 16 Be3 Qa5 17 0-0 Nc6 was pretty unclear in V.Seifert-A.Vajda, Austrian League 2004.

a2) 12 Bxf6 gxf6 (Diagram 9) reaches an interesting and pretty critical position. Fritz likes White, but after analysing this position in some detail, it becomes clear that it is difficult for White to complete his development and certainly his king is in a lot more danger than Black's. Playing against a computer I might be slightly

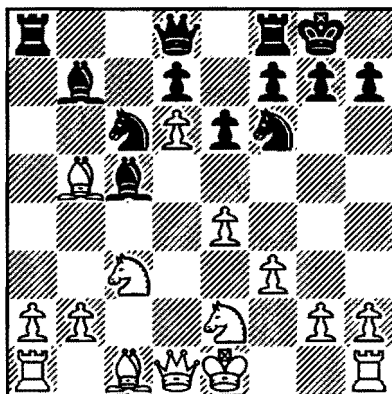
concerned, but against a human opponent, Black should be pretty happy. A sample line might run 13 a4 Na6 14 Kf1 (14 a5 Qc7) 14...Nc7, increasing the pressure against both d5 and the bishop on b5.

b) 11 Kf1!? was Wojtaszek's attempted improvement over our main line and sees White run his king to the kingside. However, Black will always have sufficient compensation, as was shown by his achieving a comfortable position with 11...exd5 12 exd5 Ba7!? 13 g3 Qb6 14 Kg2 Qf2+ 15 Kh3 Qxf3 in R.Wojtaszek-P.Harikrishna, Goa 2002.

c) White has also tried the fairly logical 11 Qd3, but after 11...exd5 12 e5 (or 12 exd5 Qb6 with typical compensation, especially as White lacks a useful plan: he cannot castle kingside and castling queenside barely improves his king's safety with Black's forces well massed on the semi-open a- and b- files) 12...Ne8 13 Nxd5 Nc6 14 Bf4 Nc7 15 Nxc7 Qxc7 16 Bxc6?! dxc6 17 Be3 Qxe5 (**Diagram 10**) Black had at least equalized in H.Lahlum-T.Kolas, Oslo 2000.



**Diagram 10 (W)**



**Diagram 11 (W)**

d) Finally, 11 dxe6 fxe6 hardly helps White as he then has to contend with the ...d5-break, Black's play down the f-file and possible piece sacrifices on e4.

### **11...Nc6 (Diagram 11) 12 Bg5 Qb6 13 Qd2**

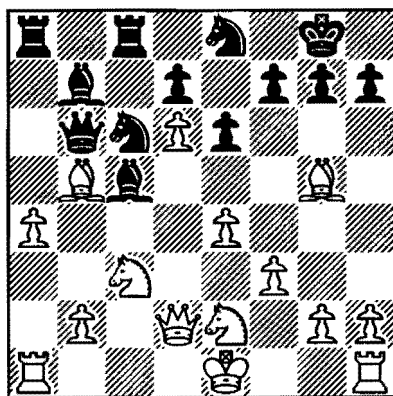
White should probably take the f6-knight on the next couple of moves, although Black will still have adequate compensation. The pawn on d6 remains very weak and without his dark-squared bishop, White's king will find itself exposed: for example, 13 Bxf6 gxf6 14 a4 Nd4 15 Nxd4 Bxd4 16 Qd3 Ba6 17 Rd1 Bxc3+ 18 bxc3 Bxb5 19 axb5 Ra2! with sufficient play for the two pawns. I must admit, though, that after the superior 19 Qxb5 Qe3+ 20 Qe2 Qxc3+ 21 Qd2 Qxd2+ 22 Rxd2 Rxa4 White is better, although I feel that Black should hold. However, this line is, of

course, not forced and Black could deviate earlier with either 14...Nb4!? or 14...Rfc8!?

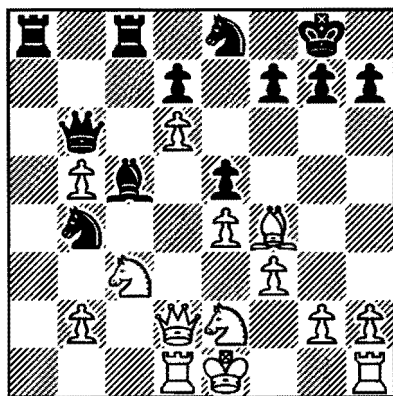
**13...Rfc8 14 a4**

14 Bxf6 might be a better practical try, but Black is fine after 14...gxf6 15 a4 Ba6 or 15...Nb4!?

**14...Ne8! (Diagram 12)**



**Diagram 12 (W)**



**Diagram 13 (W)**

Black re-routes his knight to attack the vulnerable d6 pawn, while preventing White from exchanging on f6.

**15 Bf4 Ba6 16 Rb1**

Following 16 Bxc6 Rxc6 17 a5 Qa7 18 e5 White retains his extra two pawns, but at the cost of opening many lines for Black's rooks and bishops. Indeed after 18...f6! I would take Black straightaway if offered the chance.

**16...Nb4 17 Rd1?**

This misses Black's tactic, but White's position is already unenviable: 17 Bxa6 Rxa6 18 e5 f6 and Black stands better.

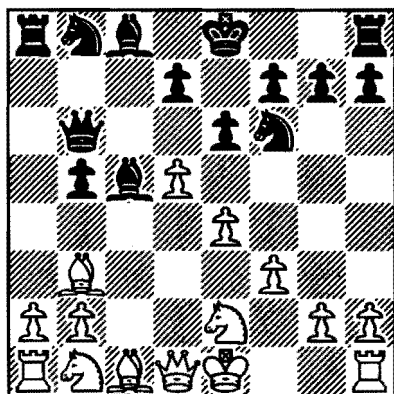
**17...Bxb5 18 axb5 e5! (Diagram 13)**

A pretty tactic. White's 17th move blocked in his queen and so the pawn on e5 is inedible due to 19...Be3, trapping the queen. Thus R.Wojtaszek-B.Predojevic, Chalkidiki 2001, continued 19 Bg5 h6! 20 Ng3 (Black also wins after 20 Bxh6 gxh6 21 Qxh6 Nc2+ 22 Kf1 Ne3+) 20...hxg5 21 Nf5 Bd4! and by offering to return the exchange, Black was much better.

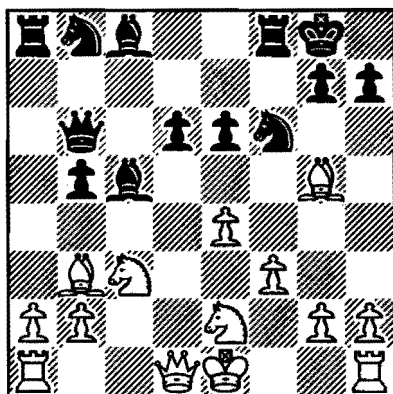
**A2) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 e6 6 e4 c4 7 Bxc4 axb5 8 Bb3 Bc5 9 Ne2**

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

A more logical and prudent choice than 9 Kf1 which we saw in Jakab-Predojevic.  
**9...Qb6! (Diagram 14)**



**Diagram 14 (W)**



**Diagram 15 (W)**

Black takes control of the important g1-a7 diagonal and prevents his f6-knight from being pinned by Bg5.

### 10 Nbc3

Another option is 10 Bg5. Strangely I have found just one game from this position and in that it was actually White to move! However, Black should be doing fine after 10...e5 11 Nbc3 d6 when he can develop normally, while White still has some problems completing his development and finding a safe square for his king.



**TRICKY TRANSPOSITION:** Another option is 10...0-0!?, transposing to the game A.Hoffman-R.Alvarez Ibarra, Elgoibar 1996. That resulted in an early but lively repetition after 11 Nbc3 b4 12 Na4 Rxa4!? 13 Bxa4 exd5 14 Bxf6 Qxf6 15 Qxd5 Qxb2 16 Rc1 d6 17 Rc2 Qa1+ 18 Rc1 Qb2.

### 10...d6 11 dxe6 fxe6 12 Bg5

Possibly 12 Nf4!? might be more critical when 12...b4 13 Nce2 (or 13 Na4 Bf2+ 14 Kf1 Qd4 and the a4-knight looks rather vulnerable) 13...Bf2+ 14 Kf1 e5 15 Ne6 Bxe6 16 Bxe6 results in a rather messy position. White remains a pawn up and has the two bishops, but is still behind in development and will find it harder than Black to complete his development. Objectively White is perhaps a little better, but Benko players should be happy to play this unbalanced and murky position.

### 12...0-0 (Diagram 15) 13 Qd2

White is struggling with his king position and the alternative 13 Nf4 b4 14 Na4?

allows Black the pretty and decisive combination 14...Bf2+ 15 Kf1? (better is 15 Kd2 Qb5, although Black still enjoys good attacking chances) 15...Rxa4! 16 Bxa4 Ba6+ 17 Nd3 Nxe4!! . Going back, White might prefer 14 Nce2, but 14...Kh8 15 Bxe6?! Nxe4! 16 fxe4 Bf2+ 17 Kf1 Bxe6 is another strong sacrifice: the bishop on e6 is taboo as 18 Nxe6? allows 18...Bg3+ 19 Nxf8 Qf2 mate. Therefore White must play 18 Be7, but Black still has a strong attack after 18...Rxf4 19 Nxf4 Bc4+ 20 Ne2 Nc6 and in fact I think that he should be winning here: Black has a huge lead in development, the two bishops are extremely strong, and White's king is stuck in the line of fire.

### 13...Nc6 14 Nd1

White proceeds logically. He wants to bring a piece to e3 to enable kingside castling, but his plan is too slow. However, 14 0-0-0 h6! would be embarrassing for White as he cannot move the bishop off the c1-h6 diagonal because of ...Be3 winning the queen.

### 14...Na5! (Diagram 16)

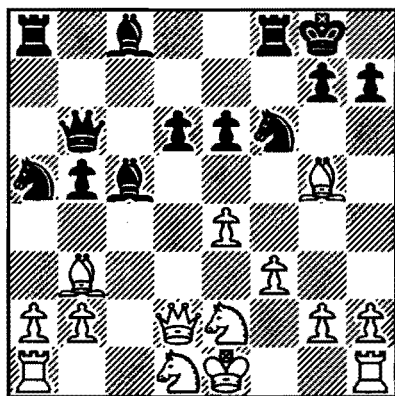


Diagram 16 (W)

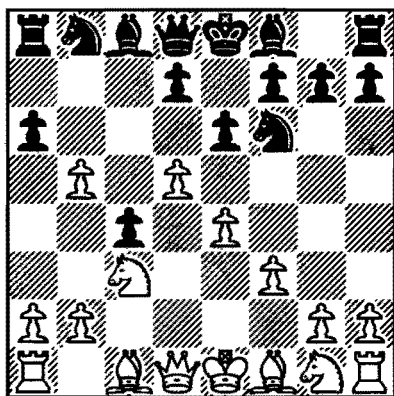


Diagram 17 (B)

Black gains a tempo on the b3-bishop as he brings his knight around to c4 to stop White's plan.

### 15 Qd3 Nc4 16 Bxc4

White wins a pawn but opens up yet more lines for Black's pieces. That said, his position already fails to inspire confidence, as also shown by 16 Nec3 d5! 17 Bxf6 Rxf6 18 exd5 exd5 19 Qxd5+ (or 19 Nxd5 Re6+ 20 Kf1 Qd6 with some advantage) 19...Re6+ 20 Ne4 Bb7 which leads to a winning attack for Black.

### 16...bxc4 17 Qxc4 d5! 18 Qc2 dxe4 19 fxe4 Ng4



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** White is in a sorry state. He has two extra pawns, but they are hardly relevant as he is miles behind in development with his king stuck in the middle of the board.

The game T.Rippis-A.Kulashko, Auckland 2003, continued 20 Bh4 Ba6 21 Nec3 and now 21...Bg1! is the prettiest and most efficient win.

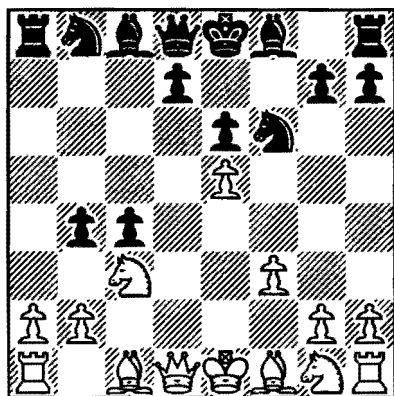
**B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 c4 c5 3 d5 b5 4 cxb5 a6 5 f3 e6 6 e4 c4 7 Nc3 (Diagram 17)**

An attempt to develop rather than grab any of the pawns on offer, but Black is left with a very comfortable set-up.

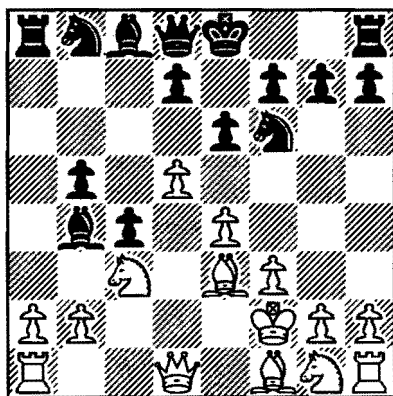
**7...axb5 8 Be3**

White has also elected to open the position, but without enjoying much success:

a) 8 dxe6?! fxe6 9 e5 b4 (Diagram 18) 10 Nb5 (or 10 exf6 bxc3 11 f7+ Kxf7 12 bxc3 Bc5 13 f4 d5 14 Nf3 Nc6 15 Ng5+ Kg8 16 Be2 Qf6 and the white position collapsed in A.De Santis-E.Danieli, Verona 2005) 10...Nd5 11 Qd4 Nc6 12 Qe4 b3 13 a4 Ncb4 saw Black seize a rather powerful initiative in J.Gonzalez Garcia-T.Fogarasi, Budapest 1995.



**Diagram 18 (W)**



**Diagram 19 (B)**

b) 8 Nxb5 Qb6 9 Nc3 (or 9 Bxc4 which reaches a fairly thematic position in which Black should have enough compensation after 9...Bc5 10 Ne2 0-0) 9...Bc5 10 Nh3 exd5 11 e5 0-0! 12 exf6 d4 13 fxg7 Re8+ 14 Be2 d3 and Black regained his piece with decent attacking prospects in L.Van der Linden-I.Rees, British League 2007.

**8...Bb4 9 Kf2 (Diagram 19)**

Despite having declined the material on offer, White still has to make concessions

in order to get his king to safety.

### 9...0-0

Black can also consider a recommendation of Stohl's, namely 9...Qa5!? which defends b5, but White is unlikely to take the pawns he has already rejected twice.

### 10 Nge2

One has to like Black's attacking chances after the rather ambitious 10 Nxb5?!

a) 10...exd5 11 e5 Re8!? 12 exf6 Rxe3!? 13 Kxe3 Qb6+ 14 Nd4 Nc6 (Stohl) leaves White's king badly exposed.

b) Similar is 10...Ra5!? 11 a4 (11 Bxc4 Nxd5! 12 exd5 Qh4+ is the neat point) 11...exd5 12 exd5 (12 e5 Nh5 13 g4 d6 14 gxh5 dxe5 gives Black plenty of compensation for the piece: not only has he two central pawns, but White's king is weak, his pawn structure fractured and he is behind in development) 12...Re8 with the idea of 13 Bxc4 Rxe3! 14 Kxe3 Qe7+ 15 Kd3 Nc6!! 16 dxc6 d5! with a huge attack.

### 10...d6 (Diagram 20)

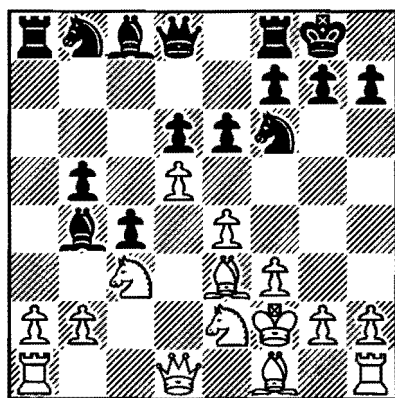


Diagram 20 (W)

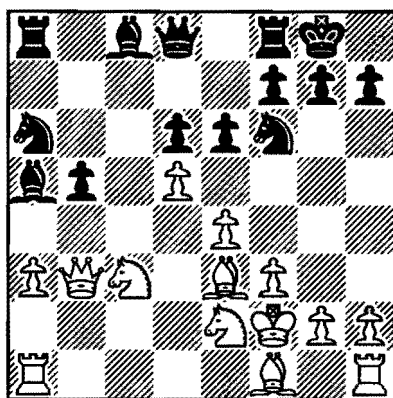


Diagram 21 (W)

### 11 a3

It is probably too late to take the pawn as after 11 Nxb5?! exd5 12 exd5 Black has 12...Re8!, lining up another sacrifice on e3 when White's dark squares will be rather weak, such as after 13 Nec3 Rxe3 14 Kxe3 Qb6+ 15 Nd4 Bxc3 16 bxc3 Nxd5+ 17 Kf2 Nxc3 18 Qd2 Nc6 with some advantage.

### 11...Ba5 12 b4

White wisely resists the temptation and doesn't open the position in the centre, whereas 12 Nxb5 exd5 13 exd5 Re8 again looks strong for Black.

### 12...cxb3

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Black wants to keep the queenside open and to control the c5-square.

**13 Qxb3 Na6! (Diagram 21) 14 Rd1**

The main idea is that 14 Qxb5 Nc5 leaves Black with very good play for his pawn.

**14...Bb6**

I wonder if 14...b4 is more accurate as then Black can continue his attack without dropping a pawn.

**15 Nd4**

Wisely avoiding 15 Qxb5? Ng4+! 16 fxxg4 Qf6+ when Black has a winning attack.

**15...e5!?**

Black changes the nature of the struggle and now wants to open the kingside with a King's Indian-like ...f5. However, it was also very possible to continue improving his minor pieces with 15...Nc5.

**16 Nc2**

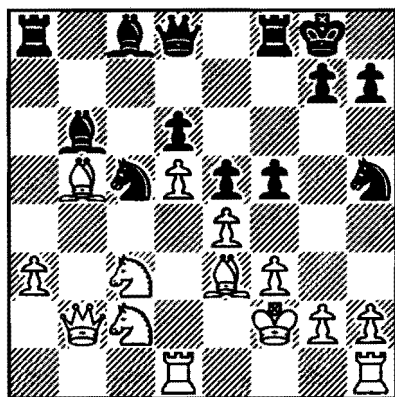
White avoids the logical 16 Ndxb5 when Black again has a familiar trick:

16...Ng4+!! 17 fxxg4 Qf6+ 18 Ke1 (Black also wins after 18 Ke2 Bxe3 19 Kxe3 Qf4+ 20 Ke2 Bxxg4) 18...Bxe3 and White is undone on the dark squares.

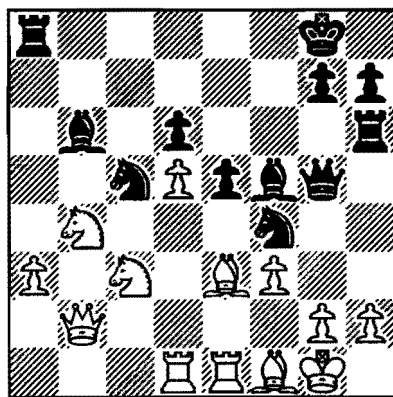
**16...Nc5 17 Qb2**

In the event of 17 Qxb5 Bd7 18 Qe2, 18...Nh5 followed by ...f5 gives Black good compensation.

**17...Nh5! 18 Bxb5 f5 (Diagram 22)**



**Diagram 22 (W)**



**Diagram 23 (W)**

Black has a powerful attack which more than compensates for the rather meaningless extra pawn on a3. The game M.Notkin-L.Nisipeanu, Bucharest 1997, contin-



ued 19 exf5 Bxf5 20 Rhe1 (White completes his development; according to Milu 20 g3 is better and gives White a slight edge, but I disagree and think that Black is clearly better after 20...Qf6, exploiting the weakening of the f3-square, such as with 21 Be2 Rab8 22 Nb4 Nd3+!! 23 Rxd3 Bxd3) 20...Nf4 21 Kg1 Rf6?! (this move is slightly inaccurate as it blocks the queen's path to the kingside; instead the superior 21...Qg5! 22 g3 Rab8, exploiting the many pins, looks good for Black) 22 Bf1 (22 Kh1! looks more accurate) 22...Rh6 23 Nb4 Qg5! (**Diagram 23**) and Black continued to pile on the pressure.

## Conclusion

---

Black's double-pawn sacrifice is likely to surprise White and, as we have seen, even strong players can collapse against it. Normally White does not expect to have to think for at least the first ten moves or so, but of course this is impossible in this variation which quickly throws the first player on to his own resources.

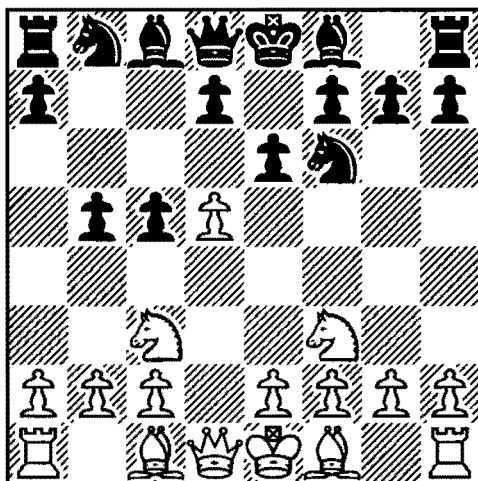
The critical test of the 6...c4 variation must be taking both pawns and trying to hang on, but Black always has plenty of resources. Instead 8 Bb3 slows the game down, but Black's compensation remains easily enough for a pawn. I'm confident that 5...e6 6 e4 c4 can be successfully used as a surprise weapon, and, furthermore, I don't see any reason not to play it against a prepared opponent either.

## Chapter Fourteen

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# The Pseudo-Blumenfeld Gambit

**1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 b5!? (Diagram 1)**



**Diagram 1 (W)**

Undoubtedly 2 Nf3 is something of a problem for the Modern Benoni player who revels in unbalanced, dynamic positions. Allowing systems like the Torre after 2...e6 is not everyone's cup of tea, and neither is 2...c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 exd5 5 Nxd5

Nxd5 6 Qxd5 d6. That solid option may not be so bad for Black, but enterprising souls may well prefer to strive for active counterplay with the Blumenfeld-like 4...b5. It has never had a great reputation, but, as we shall see, that is probably a little unfair! In any case, 4...b5 is a great way to pose a solid opponent early problems, as shown by a young Australian IM and rising star.

□ N.Ziyaev ■ D.Smerdon

Mallorca Olympiad 2004

1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 b5!? 5 dxe6

White's other main approach, just like in the Blumenfeld proper, is 5 Bg5, which we will also explore in some detail in the Looking a Little Deeper section.

5...fxe6 6 Bg5 (Diagram 2)

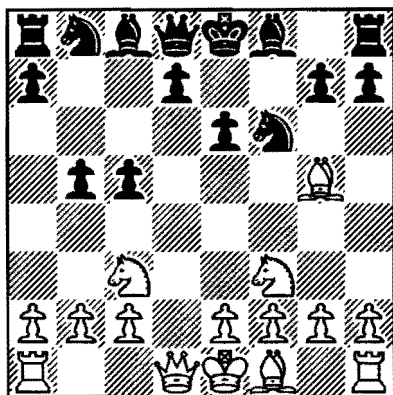


Diagram 2 (B)

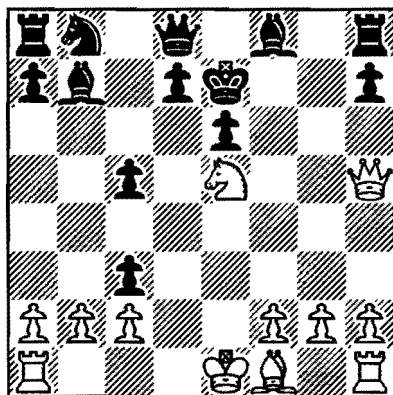


Diagram 3 (W)

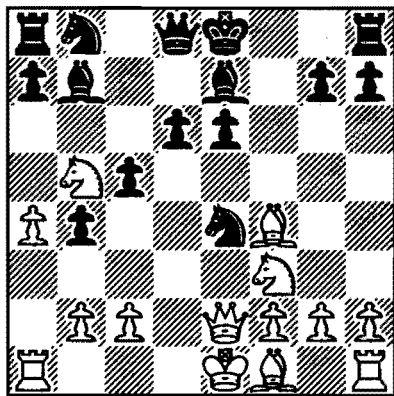
Rare, but quite possibly White wasn't familiar with 4...b5 and so mixed up the two main lines. Indeed, 6 Nxb5 is both far more common and somewhat more critical, as we will see below. Practice has also seen:

a) 6 e4 b4 7 e5 (the alternative is 7 Nb5!?, after which 7...a6 8 Nd6+ Bxd6 9 Qxd6 Nxe4 10 Qe5 Nf6 11 Qxc5 Nc6 12 Bd3 Bb7 13 Bf4 Ne7! was perhaps a little better for White, but also far from clear in N.Cummings-J.Simmelinck, correspondence 2002; Black might also consider the critical if greedy 7...Nxe4!?, although 8 Bf4 Na6 9 Bd3 Bb7 10 0-0 Be7 11 Bxe4! Bxe4 12 Nd6+ Bxd6 13 Bxd6 certainly gives White good play for his pawn) 7...bxc3 8 exf6 Bb7 (8...Nc6!? looks like a decent, unclear alternative and would avoid the draw which now occurs) 9 Bg5!? (9 f7+ Kxf7 10 Ng5+ Kg8 fails to inconvenience Black, and ...Qf6 or ...h6 will follow) 9...gxf6 10

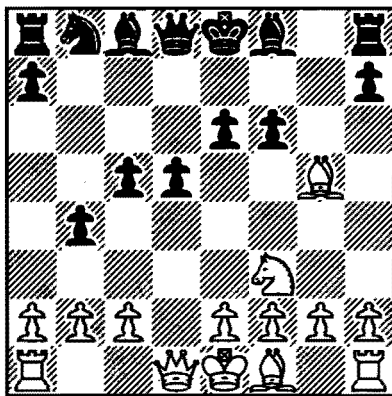
## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Ne5! (without this sacrifice White is worse) 10...fxg5 11 Qh5+ Ke7 12 Qxg5+ Ke8 13 Qh5+ Ke7 (**Diagram 3**), and if 14 0-0-0 then 14...Bd5, left White with nothing better than an early perpetual in E.Scarella-M.Olivieri, Buenos Aires 1992.

b) Another unexplored and ambitious sideline for White is 6 a4 b4 7 Nb5!? d6 8 e4, after which 8...Nxe4 9 Qe2 Nf6 10 Ng5 a6?! 11 Nxe6 Bxe6 12 Qxe6+ Be7 13 Bf4 axb5 14 Bxb5+ Kf8 15 0-0-0 d5 16 Rhe1 gave White very dangerous play for the piece in M.Vassallo Barroche-J.Ibanez Aullana, Valencia 2001. However, somewhat more critical is 9...Bb7! 10 Bf4 Be7 (**Diagram 4**) when I don't find White's compensation wholly convincing: for example, 11 Rd1 (or 11 0-0-0! when 11...Bd5 12 Rxd5 exd5 13 Qd3 Nf6 14 Ng5 Qd7 can now be met by 15 Ne6 which isn't at all clear, but Black might prefer 11...0-0!, with the idea of 12 Nxd6 Bd5 13 Nxe4 Rxf4 which looks promising) 11...Bd5 12 Rxd5 exd5 13 Qd3 Nf6 14 Ng5 Qd7 and White hasn't enough compensation, not least because his knight remains trapped on b5.



**Diagram 4 (W)**



**Diagram 5 (W)**

c) 6 e3?! is rather passive and 6...a6 7 Be2 Bb7 8 0-0 Qc7!? (avoiding the possibility of 8...d5 9 Ng5!? Qd6 10 Bg4) 9 h3 (M.Kinnunen-T.Porrasmäa, Kuopio 1995) 9...Be7 10 a4 b4 11 Nb1 Nc6 12 Nbd2 0-0 gives Black a promising Blumenfeld set-up and without having had to invest a pawn.

### **6...b4 7 Ne4**

Once again 7 Nb5!? might be preferred, trying to put White's lead in development to good use. However, I now quite like 7...Qb6 8 e4 a6 9 Ne5 (9 e5 Ne4 10 Nd6+ Nxd6 11 exd6 Qxd6 12 Bd3 Nc6 13 Qe2 Be7 should be at least okay for Black) 9...axb5!? 10 Bxf6 gxf6 11 Qh5+ Kd8 (11...Ke7!? 12 Qf7+ Kd6 13 Qxf6 Rg8 is a risky alternative) 12 Nf7+ Kc7 13 Nxf8 Nc6 and with 14...Nd4 next up, not to mention White's knight which is potentially stranded offside, I rather like Black's compensation for the exchange.

**7...d5 8 Nxf6+ gxf6 (Diagram 5)**

Now Black hasn't any pieces developed, but he does have a most impressive central pawn mass. There's little doubt that Black's pieces will find active roles, but he may not find a good home for his king so easy to come by.



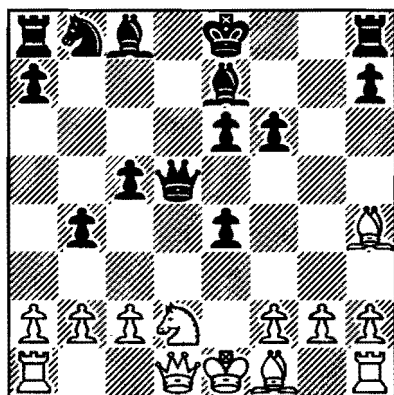
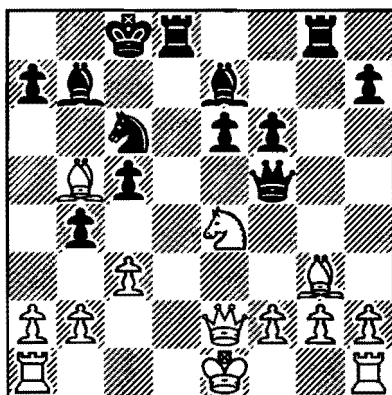
**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** Already the position is extremely unusual and unclear, and Smerdon must have been happy with his opening choice.

**9 Bh4 Be7**

Despite the last note, I can't see anything wrong for Black with 9...Bg7!? 10 e4 (the somewhat less challenging 10 e3 0-0 11 Be2 Bb7 12 0-0 Nc6 gave Black easy and good play in T.Geissler-G.Glattacker, Ellwangen 1993: that pawn centre is pretty useful and mobile) 10...0-0 11 exd5 exd5 12 Be2 Nc6 since it's not at all easy for White to exploit the split kingside pawns.

**10 e4!**

White isn't a bunny in this game (being rated 2295) and Ziyaev finds the only way to challenge Black.

**10...dxe4 11 Nd2 Qd5! (Diagram 6)****Diagram 6 (W)****Diagram 7 (B)**

Bringing the queen in front of the pawns looks like the best way to keep everything together. Instead 11...f5?! 12 Qh5+ Kf8 13 Qh6+ Kf7 14 Bxe7 Qxe7 would have probably seen White reject the perpetual in favour of 15 0-0-0! Qf6 16 Qf4, followed by Be2 and Nc4 with the initiative.

**12 Bc4**

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White might also have regained his pawn with 12 Qg4 (Emms), after which 12...Bb7 13 Bc4 Qf5 14 Bxe6 Qxg4 15 Bxg4 Nc6 followed by ...Nd4 is at least okay for Black.

### 12...Qf5 13 Qe2 Nc6

Smerdon is happy to return the pawn to castle queenside and because he hopes to later cause problems down the long a8-h1 diagonal. It was also possible to continue with 13...Bb7!? when 14 0-0 Nc6 15 Qxe4 Qxe4 16 Nxe4 Kf7 should be okay for Black. White does have a trick, but after 17 Bxf6?! Bxf6 18 Nd6+ Ke7 19 Nxb7 Bxb2 20 Rad1 Ne5 21 Bb3 Bd4 he finds Black's minor pieces rather well placed.

### 14 Bb5 Bb7 15 Nxe4

This time 15 Qxe4?! Qxe4+ 16 Nxe4 Kf7 would definitely have been favourable for Black: ...Nd4 is set to embarrass White's pieces and 17 Bxf6 Bxf6 18 Nd6+ Ke7 19 Nxb7 Bxb2 20 Rd1 Bc3+ 21 Kf1 Nd4 22 Bd3 Rac8 leaves Black in control of the position.

### 15...0-0-0 16 c3 Rhg8 17 Bg3 (Diagram 7) 17...Ne5!?

Smerdon wants to bring his knight to the d3-square. This continues his double-edged strategy, although it was also possible to play more simply with 17...Nd4 18 cxd4 Qxe4, and after 19 Bc4! the position would have been likely to fizzle out to equality.

### 18 Ba6 c4 19 Bxb7+ Kxb7 20 0-0 Nd3 21 cxb4?!

If White thought that Black was going to recapture on b4, then he was in for a nasty surprise. A much better try was to fight for the initiative with 21 b3! when 21...bxc3 (21...h5?! 22 bxc4 h4 23 Rad1! is an important idea) 22 Nxc3 Bb4 23 Ne4 Rd4 24 f3 c3 would have been extremely unclear, with all three results very possible.

### 21...h5! (Diagram 8)

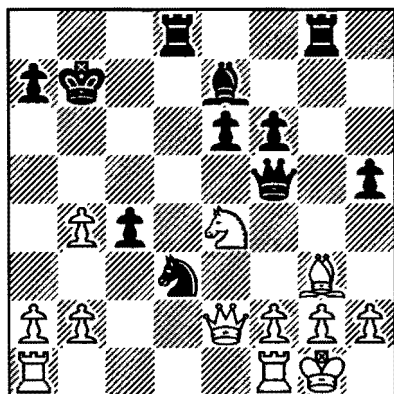


Diagram 8 (W)

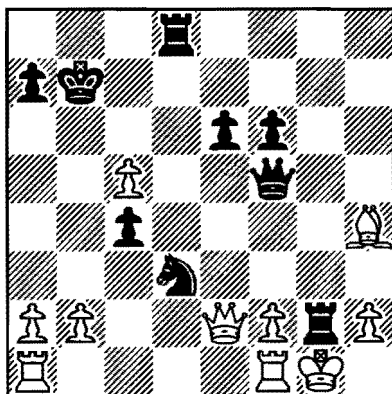


Diagram 9 (W)

Having brought his knight into the heart of the board, Smerdon now turns his attention to the kingside and already White is struggling.

## 22 Nc5+?

This loses due to a neat tactical resource. Black only would have been clearly better after 22 h4?! Rd4 23 f3 Qg6 (Emms), but there was a decent defensive try available in 22 Kh1!. Following 22...Rd4 23 f3 Bxb4 Black's pieces are well placed, but making further progress is not so easy.

## 22...Bxc5 23 bxc5 h4 24 Bxh4?

Easy to criticize, but White was already in huge trouble since 24 Bd6 would have been met by 24...Rxd6! 25 cxd6 Rxcg2+! 26 Kxg2 (26 Kh1 Qd5! echoes the game continuation) 26...Nf4+ 27 Kf3 Nxe2+ 28 Kxe2 Qd3+ 29 Ke1 Qxd6 when Black's active queen and soon-to-be-passed h-pawn easily outclass White's rooks.

## 24...Rxcg2+! (Diagram 9) 25 Kh1

It's all over as 25 Kxg2 fails, of course, to 25...Nf4+, and the text simply leaves Black with a direct and crushing attack.

## 25...Qd5 26 Qe3 Rxf2+ 0-1

# Looking a Little Deeper

## 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3

Critical according to theory, but not every white player wants to avoid the Modern Benoni. Indeed, ChessBase's *Big Database 2008* has just over 2,000 games with 3...e6, after which 4 c4 (61%) occurs somewhat more often than 4 Nc3 (36%).

## 4...b5 (Diagram 10)

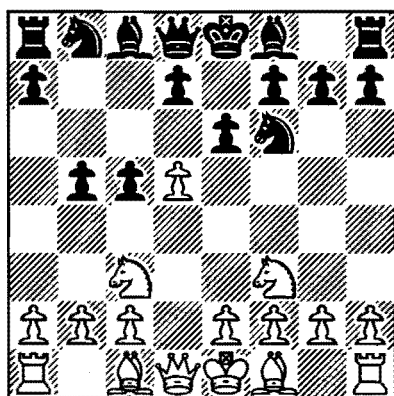


Diagram 10 (W)

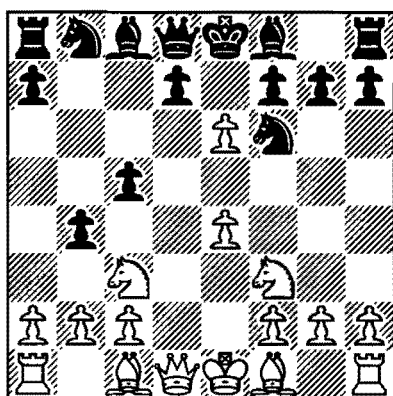


Diagram 11 (B)

Just like in the related Blumenfeld position (with c4 played instead of Nc3), White usually plumps for one of two main approaches:

---

**A: 5 dxe6**

**B: 5 Bg5**

---

The alternatives are pretty rare and Black should generally be happy to see them:

a) 5 e4 is the move which 4...b5 was directed against, and fails to impress: 5...b4 6 e5?! bxc3 7 exf6 Qxf6 (Black is already a pawn up and enjoys a powerful threat) 8 bxc3 (alternatively: 8 b3?! blunts the diagonal, but is rather grim and 8...Bb7 9 Bc4 exd5 10 Bxd5 Bxd5 11 Qxd5 Qe6+ 12 Qxe6+ fxe6 already left White unable to equalize in C.Broeker-M.Villwock, Duisburg 2005; more ambitious is 8 Bg5!?, although after 8...Qf5 9 bxc3 Qxd5 10 Qxd5 exd5 11 0-0-0 f6 12 Bf4 Bb7 13 Bb5 Kf7 14 Rhe1 Bc6 I'm not sure that White has enough for his pawn, well centralized though his pieces may be) 8...Bb7 9 dxe6 fxe6 10 Rb1 Bxf3 11 Qxf3 Qxf3 12 gxf3 Nc6 13 Rg1 g6 left Black with a pleasant edge and he went on to grind out the full point in J.Parkkinen-K.Niemi, Finnish Championship, Helsinki 2006.

Going back, White probably does better with 6 dxe6 (**Diagram 11**) when Black must be careful:



**BEWARE! 6...bxc3? is too greedy as 7 exf7+ Kxf7 8 e5 exploits the loose rook on a8 to give White the initiative.**

Thus Black has preferred 6...dxe6 in practice and after 7 Qxd8+ Kxd8 8 Nb5 a6 9 e5 (I also haven't been able to find a way for White to equalize after 9 Ne5!? Rg8 10 Nxf7+ Kd7! 11 e5 axb5: for example, 12 Bxb5+ Ke7 13 Nd6 Bd7 14 exf6+ gxf6 15 Bxd7 Nxd7 16 Ne4 f5 17 Ng3 Bg7 and White finds himself under pressure on the queenside) 9...axb5 10 exf6 gxf6 11 Bxb5 Rg8! all Black's pieces are set to be developed to good squares. Indeed 12 0-0 Bb7 13 Rd1+ Kc7 14 Ne1 Bd6 15 Bf1 Nc6 left one in no doubt that Black had once again gained the initiative in L.Andreassen-N.Miezis, Arta 2004.

b) 5 d6?! is also probably too ambitious in view of 5...Qa5. Following 6 e3 (I don't really understand the point of 6 Ng5? and after 6...h6 7 Bd2? b4 8 Nge4 bxc3 9 Bxc3 Qd8 the 2280-rated white player was simply a piece in arrears in V.Tchoubar-I.Moiseev, Kiev 2007) 6...a6 (**Diagram 12**) White's position is already suspect with Black simply intending to round up the d6-pawn after 7...Bb7 (to prevent e3-e4) and 8...Qb6.

c) The unique 5 a3 was the reaction of a grandmaster when one of Sweden's top players surprised him with 4...b5. S.Djuric-E.Berg, Taby 2007, continued 5...Bb7 (Black can also consider 5...b4!? 6 axb4 cxb4 7 Nb5 Qb6, which doesn't seem at all



bad for him with ...Bc5 and/or ...Ba6 set to follow) 6 e4 b4 7 axb4 cxb4 8 Nb5 a6 9 dxe6! (rather than lose his e-pawn, White sacrifices a piece) 9...axb5 10 Rxa8 Bxa8 11 e5 fxe6! (wisely returning the piece to complete development) 12 exf6 Qxf6 13 Bxb5 Bc5 14 0-0 0-0 15 Be2 and now, rather than advance his central pawns, Black should have preferred the more restrained 15...Bd5 16 b3 Nc6, maintaining some pressure and a small pull.

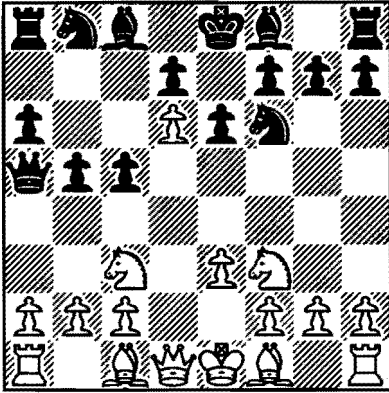


Diagram 12 (W)

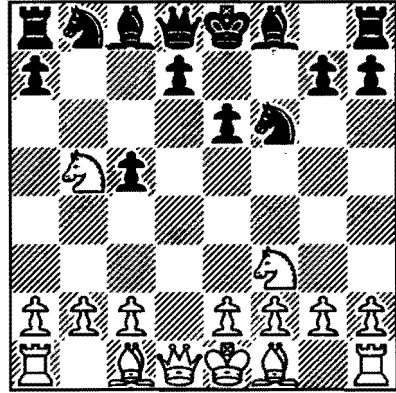


Diagram 13 (B)

#### A) 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 b5 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 Nxb5 (Diagram 13)

Accepting the pawn is the main challenge. 6 Bg5 and White's other much rarer and less explored options were covered in Ziyaev-Smerdon.

#### 6...d5

Immediately making use of the extra central pawn. The alternative is 6...Qa5+ which is designed to avoid an early c2-c4 or e2-e4 advance. Despite the fact that Lev Alburt, to date the strongest player to have employed 4...b5 on several occasions, switched from 6...d5 to this approach towards the end of his playing career, I believe that Black is better off with our main line. Firstly, it's by no means clear that White's 7th-move deviations after 6...d5 are actually so good for him and, secondly, I haven't been able to find a wholly convincing course of action for Black after 7 Nc3 d5 (those who really like to go their own way early on may wish to consider holding back ...d5, just as Black sometimes does in the Blumenfeld Accepted; such an approach is pretty rare here, but 7...Bb7!? 8 Bd2 – 8 g3!? may be a better try to coordinate White's pieces – 8...Qb6 9 e3 Be7 10 Be2 0-0 11 0-0 Nc6 12 a4 a6 13 Ng5 Rad8 wasn't too clear in G.Borgo-D.Contin, Italian Championship, Cremona 2006) 8 e3 (Diagram 14):

a) The main problem is that 8...Bd6 9 Bd2 is awkward with White well placed to

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follow up with e3-e4 and/or Nb5: for example, 9...Qd8 (K.Ottmani-C.Marzolo, Val Thorens 1998) 10 e4! d4 (or 10...dxe4 11 Ng5 with a clear advantage) 11 e5 dxc3 12 Bxc3 and White recoups his piece with interest.

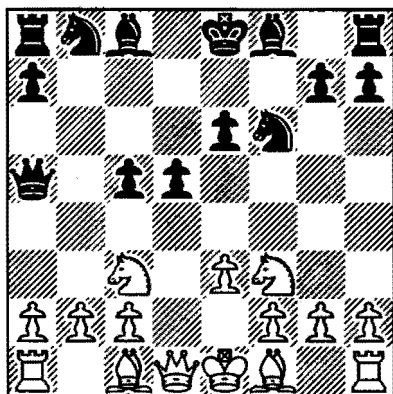


Diagram 14 (B)

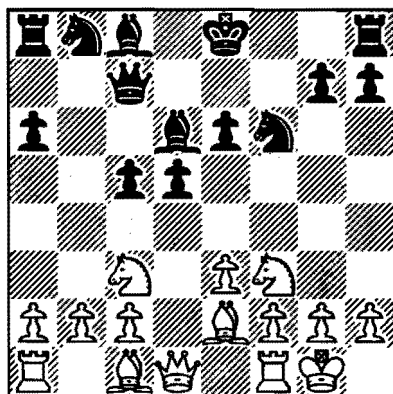


Diagram 15 (W)

b) Alburt himself preferred the slightly submissive 8...Be7 in the game J.Speelman-L.Alburt, New York (rapid) 1995. After 9 Be2 0-0 10 0-0 Nc6 11 Bd2 Qd8 12 b3! White had the easy plan of arranging e3-e4 and the attempt to cut across this with 12...d4!? 13 exd4 (but not 13 Na4 Ne4 14 Bd3 Nxd2 15 Qxd2 Bb7 16 e4? Rxf3! 17 gxf3 Bd6 with great play for the exchange) 13...cxd4 14 Na4 Ne4 15 Bd3 Nxd2 16 Nxd2! only would have confirmed which side enjoyed the upper hand.

c) 8...a6 rules out Nb5 ideas and has done well in limited practice, but the forceful 9 Be2 Bd6 10 0-0 Qc7 (**Diagram 15**) 11 e4! (rather than the meek 11 h3, as played in both M.Michna-E.Paehetz, German League 1999, and E.Cosma-M.Senff, Chambéry 2002) 11...dxe4 (Black is struggling too in the case of 11...d4 12 e5 Bxe5 13 Nxe5 Qxe5 14 Re1 Qc7 15 Bh5+ g6 16 Bf3) 12 Ng5 Bxh2+ 13 Kh1 Be5 14 Nxe4 leaves White better after both 14...Nxe4 15 Nxe4 0-0 16 f4 and 14...0-0 15 Qd3!?

### 7 e3

White's most common move, taking the sting out of the threatened 7...Qa5+. However, there are alternatives and quite critical ones at that, not least when White tries to undermine Black's centre with an early c2-c4 or e2-e4:

a) 7 c4 a6 and now:

a1) 8 Nc3?! appears a little inconsistent with White's active last: 8...d4 9 Nb1 Bd6 10 e3 0-0! (offering a second pawn to increase Black's already rather handy lead in development) 11 exd4 cxd4 12 Bg5 Qa5+ 13 Bd2 Qf5! 14 Nxd4? Qe5+ 15 Be3 Bb4+ 16 Nd2? (though horribly grim, 16 Nc3 Ne4 17 Nde2 was probably a better defen-

sive try) 16...Ne4 17 N4f3 Rxf3! 18 Qxf3 Nxd2 19 Qxa8 Qxb2 (**Diagram 16**) 20 Ke2 (or 20 Qxb8 Nb1+ 21 Qxb4 Qxb4+ 22 Kd1 Qb2 23 Rxb1 Qxb1+ and Black's extra queen is too strong) 20...Nxc4+? 21 Kf3 Ne5+? 22 Kg3 saw White miraculously escape in L.Riemersma-T.Piceu, Bruges 1995. However, Black should have crowned a fine attacking display with the simple 20...Nxf1+, which would have forced resignation in view of 21 Kf3 Bd6 or 21 Kxf1 Qxa1+ 22 Ke2 Qxh1 23 Qxb8 Qe1+ 24 Kf3 Qd1+ 25 Ke4 Qc2+ 26 Kf3 Qxc4.

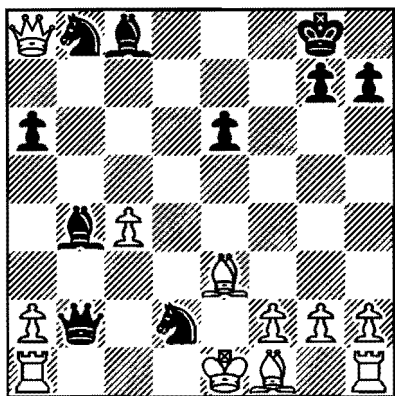


Diagram 16 (W)

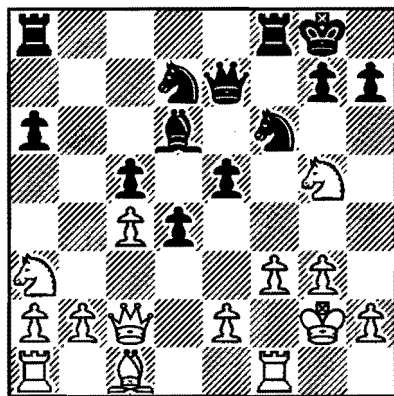


Diagram 17 (W)

a2) 8 Na3 d4!? 9 g3 Bb7 10 Bg2 e5 11 0-0 Bd6 sees both sides fight for control of the key light squares. Black should have sufficient compensation here, and certainly 12 Ng5 (12 Qb3!? Qc7 13 Bg5 might be a better try, preparing to swap off the otherwise redundant bishop, although then Black can consider 13...0-0 14 Bxf6 gxf6!? since 15 Nh4 Bxg2 16 Kxg2 Qc6+ 17 Kg1 f5 18 Qc2 e4 isn't at all clear, especially with White's knight still out of play on a3) 12...Bxg2 13 Kxg2 Qe7 14 Qc2 0-0 (correctly refusing to hurry; White still has to find a role for his queenside pieces) 15 f3 Nbd7 (**Diagram 17**) 16 Nb1 h6 17 Ne4 Nxe4 18 Qxe4 Nf6 19 Qh4 e4! worked out most logically and rather well for him in K.Baraczyszyn-S.Deak, Zalakaros 1991.

a3) 8 Qa4!? Bd7 9 Ne5 is White's most energetic follow-up, but 9...Be7 10 g3 0-0 11 Nxd7 Nbx7 12 Nc3 d4 (**Diagram 18**) gave Black a useful lead in development as compensation in M.Fiodorov-D.Arutyunova, Odessa 2005. That continued 13 Nd1 and now, as well as the game's 13...Ne5 14 f4 Neg4, Black might also consider throwing more wood on to the fire with 13...d3!?, which also looks most unclear.

b) 7 e4!? wastes no time in fighting for the initiative. I must admit that when I first analysed 4...b5!? many years ago, I was initially worried by the position arising after 7...Nxe4 8 Bf4 Bd6 9 Nxd6+ Nxd6 10 Bd3 0-0 (**Diagram 19**).

Indeed, it does look like White is slightly better with his bishop-pair and grip on

e5. However, it is actually rather hard for him to maintain control, as was borne out by the all-grandmaster clash O.Romanishin-Zhang Pengxiang, Hoogeveen 2004: 11 Bg3 (possibly 11 Qd2!? is a better try since it avoids the tactic Zhang employs; Black might counter energetically with 11...Nc6 12 0-0 Ne4!?, offering a pawn for long-term compensation: 13 Bxe4 dxe4 14 Ng5 e5 15 Qxd8 Rxd8 16 Be3 Bf5 17 Bxc5 Nd4 and Black appears to gain decent counterchances after both 18 Bxd4 exd4 19 g4 Bg6 and 18 Rae1 Rac8) 11...c4! 12 Be2 Ne4 13 0-0 Nxc3 14 hxc3 Qf6, which saw Black solving his difficulties and gave rise to a complex middle-game, with Black's queenside pressure being balanced by White's current central grip.

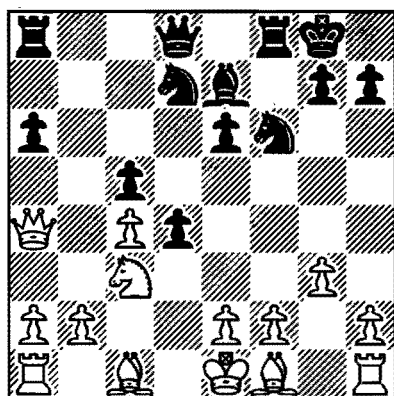


Diagram 18 (W)

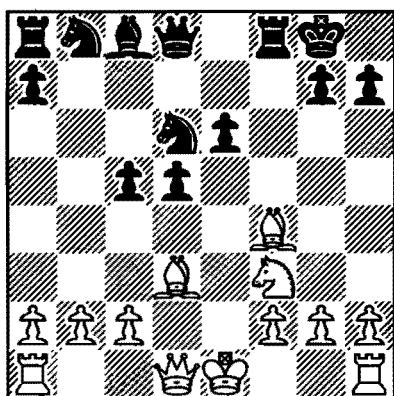


Diagram 19 (W)

c) 7 c3!? a6 8 Na3 isn't as silly as it looks, because White hopes that he can now develop both bishops before carrying out one of his two standard breaks. Following 8...Bd6 9 g3 (best, whereas 9 Bg5 Qb6! 10 Qc2 Nbd7 11 Nd2?! Rb8 12 b3 0-0 13 g3? c4 was something of a disaster for White in V.Jedner-S.Schlange, Bochum 2000) 9...0-0 10 Bg2, Black should probably try 10...Nc6 (the thematic 10...Qe7 11 0-0 Bb7 12 Bg5! Nbd7 – 12...h6 13 Bxf6 Qxf6 14 e4 Nd7 also fails to supply enough compensation after 15 Nc4 – 13 e4!, with the idea of 13...dxe4 14 Nd2 h6 15 Bxf6 Nxf6 16 Nac4, gave White an edge in M.Ruf-B.Spycher, Zurich 1989) 11 0-0 Qc7!? (Diagram 20), keeping both e6 and the c6-knight covered against ideas of c3-c4 or Ng5 and e2-e4. Once again Black relies on the potential strength of his centre and the half-open f-file to supply compensation, and after the plausible sequence 12 c4 d4 13 Ng5 Rb8! (maintaining the tension; Black should avoid 13...e5?! 14 Nb5! and I'm also a little suspicious of his hurrying the play along with 13...h6 14 Ne4 Nxe4 15 Bxe4 Bb7 16 Bd2 Nb4 17 Bxb7 Qxb7, although this may not be so bad since it is again hard for White to unravel here) 14 b3 (perhaps not the most useful of

moves, but White is slightly stuck for a good move; he might prefer to redeploy his knight from the rim, but 14 Nc2 Ne5 15 b3 h6 16 Ne4 Bb7 17 Nxf6+ Rxf6 18 Bxb7 Qxb7 sees Black beginning to align his pieces in preparation for an assault against the white king; and 14 e3 e5 15 exd4 cxd4 also leaves the second player actively placed) 14...e5 15 Bd2 Bf5 Black has seized the initiative and vindicated the decision to avoid an early ...Bb7.

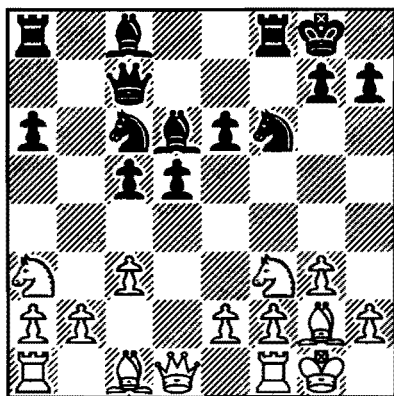


Diagram 20 (W)

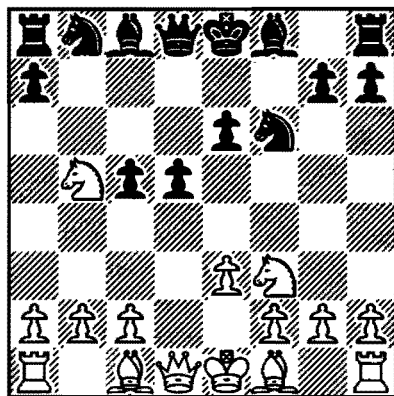


Diagram 21 (B)

d) Voluntarily retreating the knight with 7 Nc3 looks a little strange and 7...Be7 (an immediate 7...d4! is tempting, but may not be as good as it looks after 8 Nb1, preparing e2-e3 and Bc4, although 8...Be7 9 e3 Nc6 10 Bc4 0-0 11 0-0 Ne4! does give Black some play and compensation) 8 e4 d4 9 e5 dxc3! (now the queens come off and Black suffers further structural damage, but the presence of a pawn on c3 will be a real thorn in White's side) 10 Qxd8+ Bxd8 11 exf6 Bxf6 12 b3 Nc6 13 Bb5 Bd7 14 Be3 Nb4 gave Black good counterplay in K.Brakov-M.Gochev, Plovdiv 2003.

Returning to 7 e3 (Diagram 21):

7...a6!?

It might seem a little strange to force the knight back immediately, but Black wants to develop his dark-squared bishop to d6. That said, I believe that Black can also delay ...a6 for a move with 7...Nc6. Indeed, some might prefer this move order, forcing White into one of the notes to his 9th move, below, while avoiding our main line. The downside to avoiding an early e3-e4 advance is that Black must reckon with 8 c4! (Diagram 22), but I'm by no means certain that this is so good for White, contrary to existing theory's view. That hasn't approved of the sequence 8...Rb8 9 Be2 a6 10 cxd5 (Black also gains decent compensation in the event of 10 Nc3 d4 11 Na4 e5 – here his centre is pretty strong and not so easy for White

to blockade, as shown by the possible continuation 12 exd4 cxd4 13 Bg5 Bf5) 10...exd5 11 Nc3 d4! 12 Na4 Bf5 13 exd4 cxd4 14 Bc4 Bb4+ 15 Bd2 Qe7+ 16 Qe2 ever since the game J.Plachetka-K.Podzielný, Trnava 1984. However, I rather like Black's active and uncompromising play here, and after 16...Ne4! (**Diagram 23**) White must even be careful. Plachetka's notes in *Informant 37* only give 17 Bd5 (White must, of course, avoid 17 0-0?? Nxd2 18 Nxd2 Qxe2 19 Bxe2 Bxd2 when he loses a piece, and 17 a3? is also probably best avoided; this position is extremely complicated, but it seems that the accurate sequence 17...d3! 18 Bxd3 – 18 Qe3 Bxd2+ 19 Nxd2 Ne5 is also strong – 18...Bxd2+ 19 Nxd2 Nd4 20 Qe3 Nxd2 21 Qxe7+ Kxe7 22 Kxd2 Nb3+ 23 Ke3 Bd7! picks up the exchange and leaves White struggling), which he assessed as clearly favouring White, even though 17...Ne5! continues to give Black active and easy play, such as after 18 Bxe4 (probably White should fight for the initiative himself with 18 0-0!? when 18...Nxd2 19 Nxe5 is a reasonable exchange sacrifice, albeit one which merely keeps the position extremely murky and unclear in the event of 19...Nxf1 20 Rxf1 Rd8) 18...Bxe4 19 Bxb4 Qxb4+! (probably even stronger than 19...Nxf3+!? 20 gxf3 Qxb4+ 21 Kf1 0-0 22 fxe4 Qxa4, which only supplies sufficient compensation) 20 Nd2 0-0 21 Qxe4 Rbe8 when White experiences certain difficulties down the e-file.

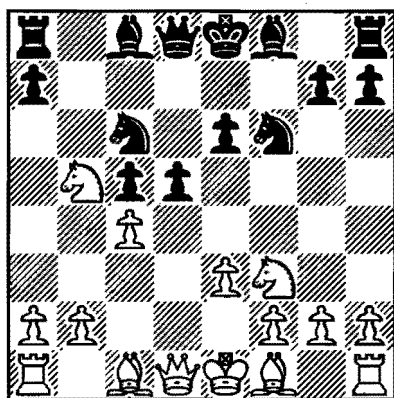


Diagram 22 (B)

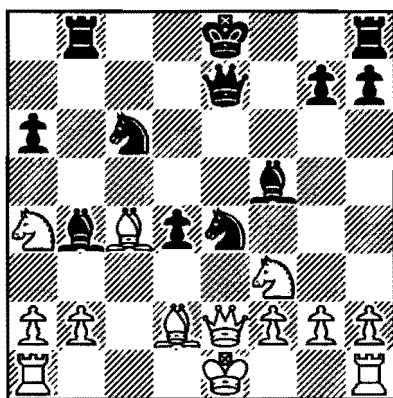


Diagram 23 (W)



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** One should never take analysis as read! As we have just seen, 7...Nc6 8 c4 has long been erroneously condemned as it actually gives Black a very active position. Indeed, had Podzielný found 16...Ne4 it would probably have been he, rather than Plachetka, who would have been the winner annotating their game for the *Informant*!

## 8 Nc3 (Diagram 24)

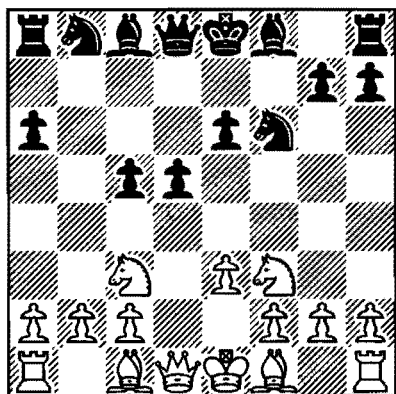


Diagram 24 (B)

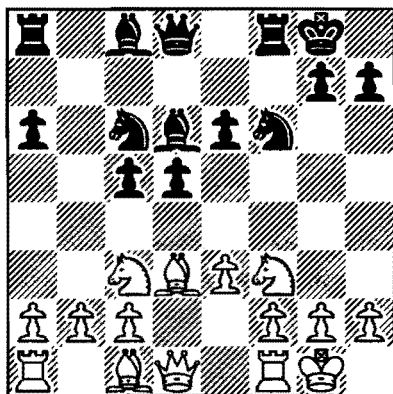


Diagram 25 (W)

## 8...Nc6



**BEWARE! Black wants to develop his bishop to d6, but must delay it for a move because 8...Bd6? 9 e4! is rather awkward.**

Following 9...dxe4 10 Ng5 0-0 11 Ncx4 Nxe4 12 Nxe4 Qh4 13 Qe2! Black was already in huge trouble (13...Be7? 14 g3 traps the queen) in M.Hebden-C.Philippe, Cappelle la Grande 2004.

However, there might be so mileage in exploring a game between two old masters. In V.Chekhover-V.Alatortsev, Leningrad 1936, 8...Nbd7!? 9 Be2 (9 Ng5 Qb6 covers e6, but White might prefer to bolster his kingside with 9 g3!? and Bg2) 9...Bd6 10 0-0 0-0 11 Ng5 Qe7 12 f4 h6 13 Nh3 Bb7 14 Bf3 was perhaps a little better for White. However, Black might have now tried the anti-positional idea 14...Ne4!? 15 Bxe4 dxe4 16 Nf2 Nf6, intending to follow up with ...Rad8, ...Qf7-g6 and only then ...e5, which doesn't look too bad a try, especially with the white pieces a little constricted.

## 9 e4!?

Critical. White is prepared to return the pawn to break up Black's strong centre. However, he hasn't always fought for the initiative thus and practice has also seen:

a) 9 Bd3 Bd6 10 0-0 (if White wants to break in the centre, he shouldn't delay: 10 e4!? may improve with the idea of 10...d4 11 Ne2; this isn't so bad for Black after 11...0-0 12 0-0 Qc7, although in Xie Jianjun-Xu Yang, Wuxi 2005, Black played somewhat

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more creatively and 10...0-0!? 11 Bg5 Qe8 12 Qe2 Nd4! 13 Nxd4 cxd4 14 Bxf6 gxf6 supplied decent counterplay) 10...0-0 (**Diagram 25**) 11 e4? (once again White hopes to re-route his queen's knight to the kingside after 11...d4, but this break has become too ambitious in view of Black's energetic riposte) 11...Nd4! 12 exd5 (now Black strikes on the kingside; perhaps 12 Bg5 is a better try, although the further sacrifice 12...Qc7!? 13 exd5 Bb7 certainly looks rather scary from the first player's perspective, especially with Black's bishops raking his kingside) 12...Ng4! 13 Bxh7+! (White had presumably been relying on this tactic, especially as 13 Nxd4? Bxh2+! 14 Kh1 Qh4 forces him to part with his queen for insufficient material) 13...Kh8! 14 Ng5!? (slightly desperate; White had to avoid 14 Nxd4? Bxh2+ 15 Kh1 Qh4 16 Bg5 Qxg5 17 Nf3 Qh6, and it's not hard to see why he was also far from keen on 14 h3 Nxf3+ 15 gxf3 Nf6 16 Be4, but perhaps this extremely ugly try was actually his best defence) 14...Bxh2+ 15 Kh1 exd5 (**Diagram 26**) left both kings exposed, but Black with the much more powerful attack in M.Konopka-P.Vavra, Czech League 2004. It's not at all easy to find a defence for White here and indeed Konopka quickly collapsed with 16 f3? (in his *ChessPublishing.com* column, John Emms points out a beautiful finish after the alternative, 16 Bg6: 16...Bf4! 17 Bxf4 Rxf4 18 Nh3 Qd6! 19 g3 Qxg6! 20 gxf4 Qh5 21 Kg2 Ne3+! 22 fxe3 Bxh3+ with a decisive attack) 16...Qd6 17 fxg4? Bxg4 18 Qd3 c4 (overloading the white queen) 19 Bf4 Bxf4 and 0-1.

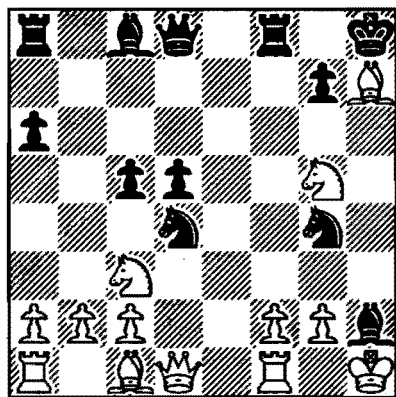


Diagram 26 (W)

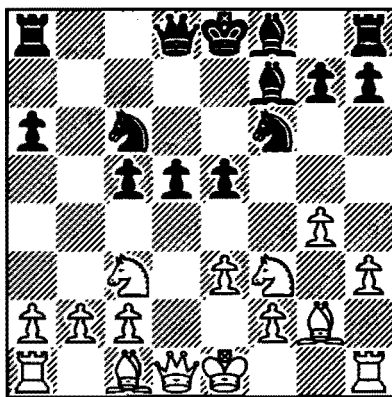


Diagram 27 (W)

b) 9 g3 produces a slightly unaesthetic appearance in conjunction with the earlier e3, but does at least bolster up White's kingside against the forthcoming attack. Following 9...e5 10 Bg2 practice has seen:

b1) 10...e4 11 Nd2 Bg4?! (probably too provocative; Black's position doesn't appear too bad after the calmer 11...Be7!? 12 0-0 0-0, with the idea of 13 f3 d4! when the reader may wish to investigate the resulting complications: one key line runs 14 Ncxe4 dxe3 15 Nxf6+ Bxf6 16 Ne4 Qxd1 17 Rxd1 Bd4 18 Kh1 Nb4! 19 c3 Nc2 20



cx d4 cx d4 and Black will at the least regain his material) 12 f3 exf3 13 Nxf3 Qd7 14 0-0 Be7 15 e4! illustrated a model way to dismantle Black's once-proud centre and favoured White after 15...d4 16 Nd5 in D.Root-L.Alburt, Los Angeles 1987.

b2) 10...Bg4!? 11 h3 Bh5 creates some awkward pressure down the d1-h5 diagonal. In R.Allicock-A.Jackson, British League 2006, White decided that the pin had to be broken, but 12 g4 Bf7 (**Diagram 27**) 13 g5 Ng8! (I rather like this retreat which challenges White to find a good move; the main idea is that the knight will be redeployed to e7 to fight for control of the key d5-square) 14 e4 d4 15 Nd5 remained far from clear. Black should probably now have settled for 15...Bd6!? (Jackson preferred 15...Nge7, but then 16 Qe2! would have been a bit awkward) 16 c4 Nge7 17 0-0 0-0, retaining decent long-term compensation. White might be a pawn up and enjoy a knight on d5, but his other pieces aren't too active and his kingside is rather extended, especially with ...Bh5 a strong possibility.

c) 9 Be2 Bd6 (9...d4!? 10 Na4 e5 is an ambitious alternative) 10 0-0 0-0 11 Bd3 invests a tempo to angle for the e4-break after all. Now 11...Qc7 (there is also an argument for making White move his bishop yet again, and 11...c4!? 12 Be2 Qc7 13 h3 Bb7 would probably be my preference, especially since 14 e4!? is well met by 14...dxe4 15 Ng5 Rad8, intending 16 Qe1 Nd4) 12 e4 Nd4 (prudently avoiding 12...c4 13 exd5 exd5? which fails to 14 Nxd5! Nxd5 15 Bxc4) 13 exd5 (**Diagram 28**) 13...Nxf3+ (13...exd5? 14 Nxd4 cx d4 permitted the deep combination 15 Nxd5! Nxd5 16 Bxh7+ Kh8 17 Be4 in J.Avalos Parra-M.Llorens Sepulveda, Santiago 2005, when the tactics all work for White, as shown by the line 17...Bxh2+ 18 Kh1 g6!? 19 Bh6! Qh7 20 Kxh2 Qxh6+ 21 Kg1 Rd8 22 Qxd4+ Qg7 23 Rfd1 Be6 24 Qxg7+ Kxg7 25 c4) 14 Qxf3 c4!? looks like a reasonable try to continue stirring up trouble, and after 15 Be4 Bb7 16 Qh3 Rae8 17 Bf3 exd5 18 Be3 Be5 Black's active pieces (...d4 and ...Qa5 are two ideas in the position) continue to supply compensation for the pawn.

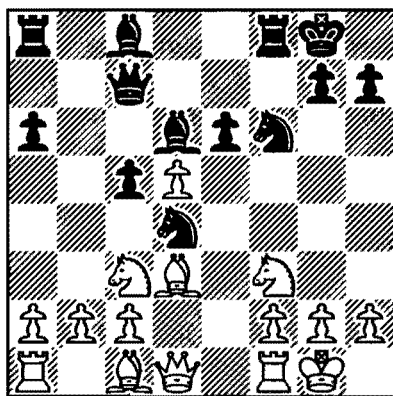


Diagram 28 (B)

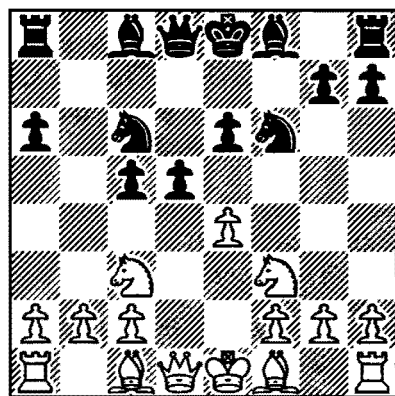


Diagram 29 (B)

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Returning to 9 e4 (**Diagram 29**):

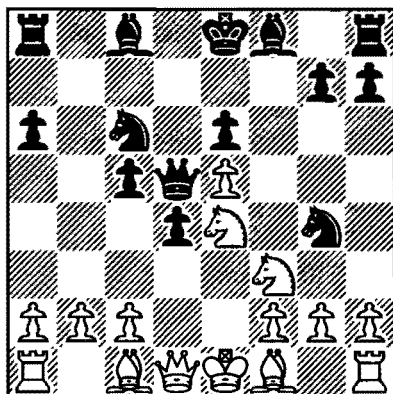
**9...d4**

Black does, of course, want to keep his centre intact, not see it split after 9...dxe4? 10 Qxd8+ Nxd8 when both forward leaps of the f3-knight look promising.

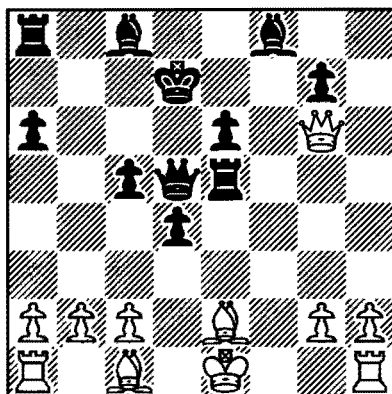
**10 e5**

The point behind White's 9th. White wants to show that both sides can play actively, but the price is that e5-pawn does become weak.

**10...Ng4 11 Ne4 Qd5! (Diagram 30)**



**Diagram 30 (W)**



**Diagram 31 (W)**



**BEWARE!** There's not much point in sacrificing a pawn for activity, only to give up all that activity in an over-hurried bid to regain it. Here 11...Ngxe5? 12 Nxe5 Nxe5 regained the pawn in P.Toth-M.Salles, Rio de Janeiro 1991, but 13 Qh5+ Nf7 14 Bc4 Be7 15 0-0 left White with much the superior piece coordination.

That's not to say that Black cannot force the pace here, and the text move most certainly prepares to regain the pawn, but crucially on Black's terms.

**12 Nfd2**

This has been tried in the only two games to have reached this position, but is not forced. That said, White also shouldn't be able to gain any advantage with the alternatives:

a) 12 Nfg5!? (sharpening the struggle) 12...Ncxe5! 13 f4 h6 14 fxe5 hxg5 15 Qxg4 Rh4 16 Qxg5 Rxe4+ 17 Be2 Rxe5 18 Qg6+ Kd7 (**Diagram 31**) can only, just like our main line, be described as a complete mess. White's king might retain castling

rights, but I slightly prefer Black due to his central and light-squared pressure.

b) 12 Qe2 Ncxe5 13 Nxe5 Nxe5 14 g3 d3!? (14...Bb7 15 Bg2 Qc4 16 Qxc4 Nxc4 is a sensible alternative which is about equal) 15 cxd3 c4! 16 dxc4!? (electing to sacrifice; after the alternative 16 Bg2 Nxd3+ 17 Kf1 Qf5 18 Nf6+ Qxf6 19 Bxa8 Bc5 it's Black who enjoys reasonable play at the cost of an exchange) 16...Bb4+ 17 Bd2 Bxd2+ 18 Nxd2 Qxh1 19 Qxe5 0-0 20 0-0-0 gives White some play for the exchange.

### 12...Ncxe5

Once again Black must be accurate. The inferior 12...Ngxe5?! allows White the strong possibility of 13 f4!, and after 13...Ng6 14 Bc4 Qd8 15 0-0 Na5 16 Bd3 Be7 17 Ng5!? Bxg5 18 fxg5 Ne5 19 Be4 Black was struggling in E.Spencer-N.Berry, Scottish Championship, Stirling 2002.

### 13 g3

Fighting for control of the long diagonal must be critical. Of course, White cannot contemplate 13 f4? here on account of the embarrassing reply 13...Ne3.

### 13...Bb7 14 Bg2 0-0-0 15 0-0 (Diagram 32)

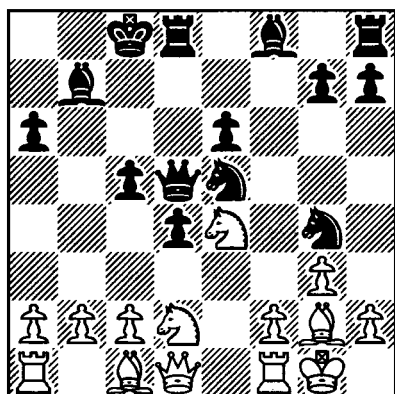


Diagram 32 (B)

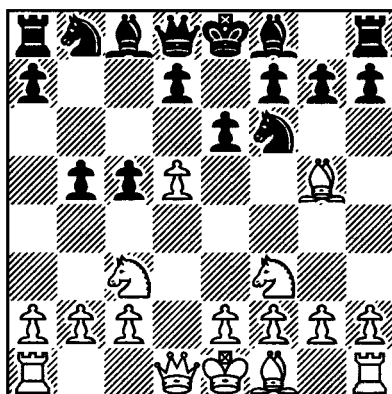


Diagram 33 (B)

This double-edged and extremely unclear position was reached in M.Polyakov-D.Kononenko, Dnipropetrovsk 2006. Play continued 15...h5 (Black might try to keep White bottled up with 15...d3!?) 16 h3 Nf6 17 b3 h4 18 f4 and now Kononenko retreated his knight to f7. A tempting and worthy alternative is 18...d3!? and after 19 Bb2 dxc2 20 Qxc2 Nxe4 21 Nxe4 Qd3 22 Qxd3 Nxd3 23 Bc3 hxg3 it seems that the position has resolved to rough equality.

### B) 1 d4 Nf6 2 Nf3 c5 3 d5 e6 4 Nc3 b5 5 Bg5 (Diagram 33)

Just like in the Blumenfeld, declining the gambit in favour of actively developing

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with Bg5 is a critical and no less popular alternative.

### 5...b4

The b5-pawn couldn't be left in limbo and so Black utilizes its early activity to continue to force the pace.

### 6 Ne4

By far White's main choice, although practice has also seen:

a) 6 Na4 was employed by a highly-respected theoretician when surprised by 4...b5 in no lesser game than K.Sakaev-S.Volkov, FIDE World Championship (rapid play-off), New Delhi 2000: 6...Qa5 7 Bxf6 gxf6 8 b3 f5 (**Diagram 34**) 9 e3 (only needing to draw to progress to the next round, Sakaev rejects the more principled 9 e4!?, not that 9...fxe4 10 Ng5 Qc7! – re-routing the queen to defend and avoiding the exchange sacrifice 10...Bg7 11 Nxe4! – 11 Qh5 Qf4 12 dxe6 dxe6 13 Rd1 Be7 14 Bb5+ Kf8 was anything more than highly unbalanced and unclear in D.Hergott-U.Adianto, Copenhagen 1982; even worse for White, though, is 11 dxe6 dxe6 12 Nxe4?! because after 12...Qe5 13 Bd3 Bd7 all three of Black's diagonal-travelling pieces have good roles and he is ready to embarrass the white knights with 14...c4) 9...Rg8 (as pointed out by Tsesarsky in his *ChessBase* annotations, Black should prefer to immediately attack d5 with 9...Bb7!; then 10 Bc4 Rg8 11 0-0 Na6 isn't at all clear, but Black's pressure against g2 and, after ...Nc7, d5 is quite useful, and 10 dxe6 dxe6 11 Ne5 Qc7 12 Bb5+ Ke7, as indicated by the Israeli analyst, also gives Black good counterplay) 10 Ne5 Bb7 11 Qh5 Rg7 12 dxe6 dxe6 13 Nb2 (the knight was doing a fine blockading job where it was, and Tsesarsky's idea of 13 0-0-0!? is more challenging; certainly 13...Nc6 14 Nd7! 0-0-0 15 Nxf8 Rxf8 16 Qh4 leaves White a little better) 13...Nc6 14 Nbc4 Qc7 15 Nxc6?! Bxc6 16 Rd1 Bd5 and Black, having emerged from the opening with the bishop-pair and good pressure against g2, went on to win and thereby square the match.

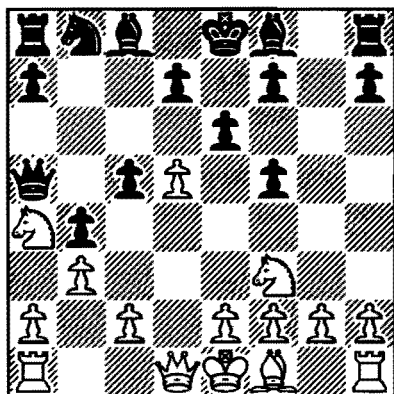


Diagram 34 (W)

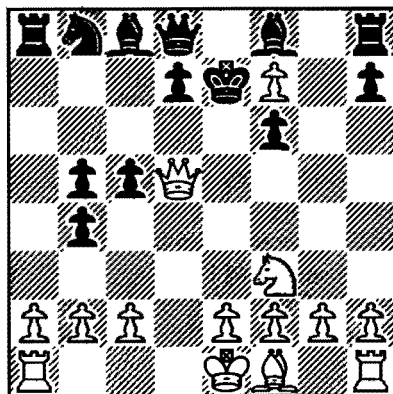


Diagram 35 (B)

b) 6 Nb5? is either a blunder or an overly-optimistic sacrifice. Following 6...a6 7 Bxf6 (7 dxe6 axb5 8 exf7+ Kxf7 9 Bxf6 Kxf6 10 Qd5 Nc6 11 e4 g6 also left White with insufficient compensation in T.Rosenlund-M.Reinert, Hillerod 1985) 7...gxf6 8 dxe6 axb5 9 exf7+ Ke7 10 Qd5 (**Diagram 35**) White has a bit of play for his piece, but surely not enough and 10...Qc7!? (Black is happy to return some material to gain the initiative, but the more materialistic 10...Ra6 is also very possible) 11 Qe4+ (11 Qxa8 Bb7 12 Qa7 Kxf7 doesn't trap the queen on account of 13 Nd4, but after 13...cxd4 14 Qxd4 Qxc2 15 e3 Bc5 16 Qd2 Qe4 Black enjoys a strong initiative) 11...Kxf7 12 Rd1?! Bb7 already left White in desperate trouble in C.Srienz-J.Hajek, Vienna 1990.

c) 6 Bxf6 gxf6 7 Ne4 transposes to the notes to White's 7th move, below, after 7...Bb7, but Black can also utilize White's move order to try 7...f5!?. However, now White has an improved version of our last note and 8 dxe6! fxe4 9 exf7+ Ke7 10 Qd5 (J.Ulko-V.Khromov, Moscow 1996) 10...Nc6 11 Qxe4+ Kxf7 12 Ne5+ gives him a strong enough attack to draw, with the game likely to end in perpetual after 12...Nxe5 13 Qxe5 Qf6 (**Diagram 36**) 14 Qd5+ Kg7 15 Qxa8 Qxb2 16 Rd1 Qc3+ 17 Rd2 Qa1+.

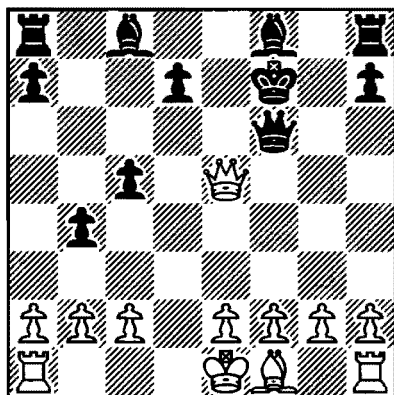


Diagram 36 (W)

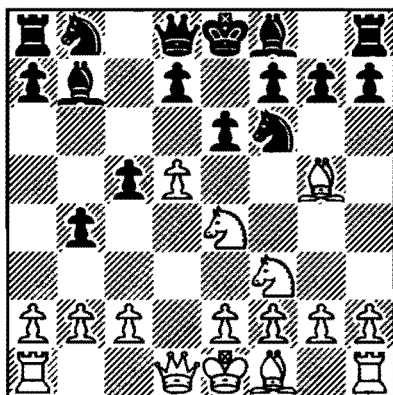


Diagram 37 (W)

Returning to 6 Ne4:  
6...Bb7 (**Diagram 37**)



**BEWARE!** Black should continue to undermine d5, not fearing a doubling of his f-pawns, rather than break the pin with 6...Be7?! when 7 d6! Nxe4 8 Bxe7 Qb6 9 Ne5 was awkward in V.Prosviriakov-L.Alburt, New York 1991.

## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

The text is somewhat stronger and interestingly NCO halts its coverage of 5 Bg5 at this point with an assessment of 'unclear'.

### 7 c4

Probably the most challenging. White should avoid 7 Nxf6+? gxf6 when he loses his d-pawn, but 7 Bxf6 gxf6 8 c4 f5 9 Ng3 has received some outings. However, Black is strong on the dark squares and his advanced f-pawn controls some useful squares. Indeed, his game already rather appeals and 9...d6 (Black has got into trouble on occasion in this position by playing too aggressively, but it does seem that 9...Bg7 10 Qd2 h5!? 11 h4 Qf6 is a worthy alternative; A.Utkin-I.Khairullin, St Petersburg 2004, continued 12 Rb1 Na6 13 e4 fxe4 14 Nxe4 Qe7 15 Qe3 Bh6! 16 Qe2 d6 17 g3?! f5! and Black was in control of the initiative) 10 e3 (once again 10 e4!? looks more challenging, although 10...Qf6! 11 Qc2 Nd7 12 Bd3 f4!? 13 Ne2 Rg8 did nonetheless still give Black good activity in A.Caoili-D.Reizniece, Mallorca Women's Olympiad 2004) 10...Nd7 11 Bd3 Qf6 (**Diagram 38**) 12 Rb1 0-0-0 13 0-0 h5 14 a3 h4 15 Ne2 Ne5 gave Black decent counterplay in A.Gorbatow-G.Guseinov, Moscow 1996.

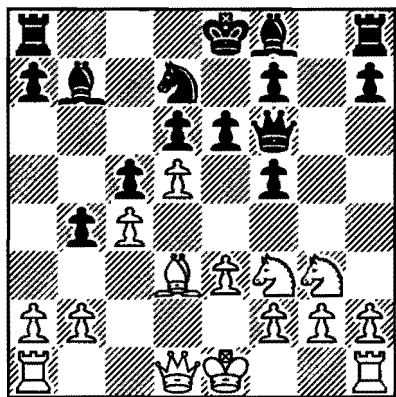


Diagram 38 (W)

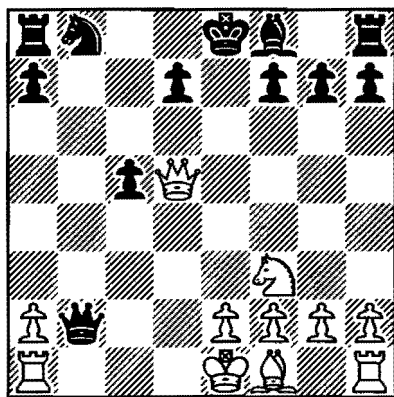


Diagram 39 (W)

### 7...bxc3

Black opens the b-file and continues to under the defence of d5. A somewhat less common alternative is 7...Be7, but after 8 Bxf6 (White must play precisely: 8 Nxf6+ Bxf6 9 Qd2 0-0 10 Bxf6 Qxf6 11 e3 d6 12 Be2 exd5 13 cxd5, as in T.Wyrwich-P.Meyer, German League 2001, and now 13...Nd7, heading for b6, gives Black sufficient counterplay) 8...gxf6 9 Ng3! f5 10 Qd2 a5 (10...h5!?) 11 e4 (also promising is 11 Nh5!?, preventing Black from settling his bishop on the long dark-squared diagonal) 11...fxe4 12 Nxe4 White was able to retain control and thus the upper hand in A.Goldin-M.Ruiz, Philadelphia 1999.

### 8 Bxf6



**DANGEROUS WEAPON!** White has often preferred 8 Nxc3, only to be shocked by 8...Bxd5! 9 Nxd5 exd5 10 Bxf6 Qxf6 11 Qxd5 when it turns out that 11...Qxb2 (Diagram 39) is at least equal for Black.

In one of the first outings with 4...b5, White was swiftly destroyed in the game I.Figler-F.Sideif-Zade, correspondence 1983: 12 Rd1 (otherwise White simply finds himself a pawn in arrears) 12...c4!? (Black doesn't want to agree to a draw just yet, which he could force with 12...Qc3+ 13 Rd2 Qa1+, as occurred in another early game, Z.Mestrovic-G.Dizdar, Oberwart 1983; White's only attempt to play on is 14 Rd1 Qc3+ 15 Nd2!?, but after 15...Nc6 16 e3 Qe5 17 Bc4 it's not clear that his grip fully compensates for the pawn as shown by the possible continuation 17...Qxd5 18 Bxd5 Rc8 19 Nc4 g6! 20 0-0 Ke7 21 Rb1 Nb4) 13 Qe4+ (best: White's position is hopeless in the event of the greedy 13 Qxa8? which fails to 13...Bb4+ 14 Nd2 Bxd2+ 15 Rxd2 Qb1+ 16 Rd1 Qb4+ 17 Rd2 c3 and 18...c2; 13 Qxc4?! Bb4+ 14 Nd2 is probably also worth avoiding, and 14...0-0 15 Qb3 Qxb3 16 axb3 Rc8 left Black with a useful initiative in M.Pazdziora-E.Sharapov, Jarnoltowek 2004) 13...Kd8! (correctly giving up castling rights because after 13...Be7 14 e3 c3 15 Bd3 Nc6 16 0-0 Black can't castle in any case and White has the initiative, as noted by Sideif-Zade) 14 Nd2 Bb4 15 Qxa8? (too greedy and if White was in a materialistic mood, possibly he should have preferred 15 e3 c3 16 Qxa8 c2 17 Qxb8+ Ke7; after 18 Qxb4+ Qxb4 19 Rc1 Qb2 20 Nb3 Qc3+ 21 Ke2 Rb8, as given in Sideif-Zade's notes, and now 22 g3 Qc6 23 f3 Qc3 24 Bg2 d5 25 Nd4 Rb2, Black can't be worse with that monster c-pawn, although it's not easy for him to make any progress after 26 a4) 15...Bxd2+ 16 Rxd2 Qb1+ 17 Rd1 Qb4+ 18 Rd2 c3 (Diagram 40) 19 Qxa7 c2! (once again we see that Black's c-pawn is simply too strong) 20 Qxb8+ Qxb8 21 Rxc2 h5 0-1.

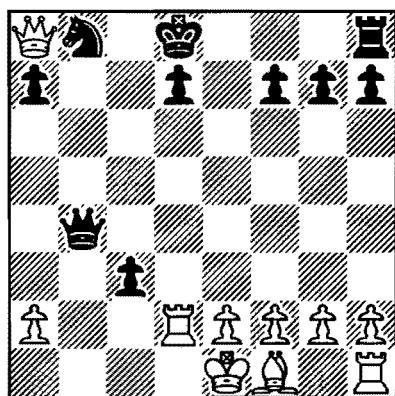


Diagram 40 (W)

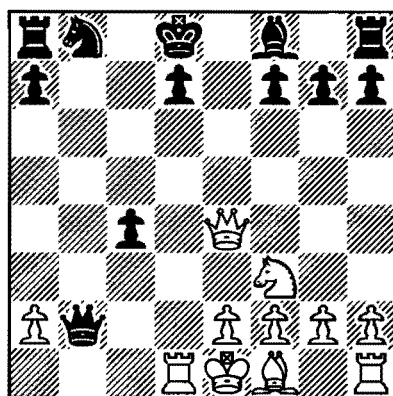
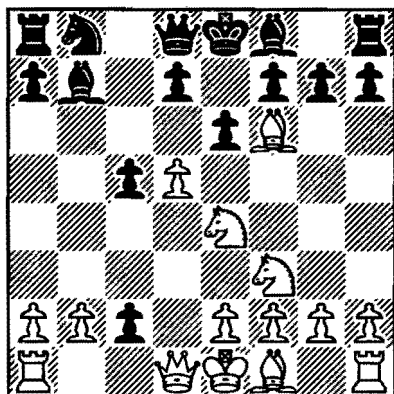


Diagram 41 (W)

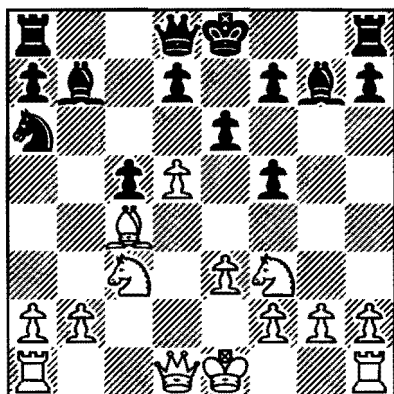
## Dangerous Weapons: The Benoni and Benko

Going back to 13...Kd8 (**Diagram 41**) White has also tried 14 Qxc4 Nc6 15 Qd5, but after 15...Bb4+ 16 Nd2 Re8 17 e3 Re6! 18 Qb3 Qxb3 19 axb3 Na5 he found himself on the back foot in K.Sorri-T.Porrasmäa, Finnish League 1994. We should analyse too the fairly critical 14 Rb1!? Qxa2 15 Ne5, giving up a second pawn to fight for the initiative. However, after 15...Nc6 (15...Qa5+!? 16 Kd1 Qa4+ 17 Qc2 Qxc2+ 18 Kxc2 Ke8 is pretty risky for Black, but might just about be tenable in view of the line 19 g3 Na6 20 Bg2 Rc8! 21 Bb7 Rc5) 16 Nxc6+ dxc6 the game is very likely to end in perpetual, such as after 17 Qd4+ Kc8 18 Qg4+ Kc7 19 Qf4+ Bd6 20 Qxf7+ Kd8 21 Rb7 Qa5+ 22 Kd1 Qa1+.

**8...c2! (Diagram 42)**



**Diagram 42 (W)**



**Diagram 43 (W)**

This both deflects the queen from the defence of d5 and enables ...f5 to come with tempo against White's knight on e4. Quite why it has only been played twice (both times by the Dutch correspondence player Joop Simmelink) is a mystery to me. Much more common has been 8...gxf6 9 Nxc3 f5 (Black must obtain some counterplay down the long diagonal; he has unsurprisingly struggled when this advance has been delayed) 10 e3 (more aggressive is 10 dxe6 fxe6 11 e4, but 11...fxe4 12 Nd2 Qg5! 13 Qb3 Bc6 was okay for Black in L.Weglarz-T.Rakowiecki, Porabka 1986) 10...Bg7 11 Bc4 and now Black has tried a host of moves. The best one to explore for anyone not happy with our main line is 11...Na6! (**Diagram 43**), after which I don't feel that Black should be worse. I.Platonov-L.Zaid, Kiev 1984, continued 12 0-0 (Black obtains enough counterplay after 12 d6 Qb6! 13 Qd2 Qb4 14 Be2 c4) 12...0-0 13 Rc1 (White might also try 13 dxe6!?, with the idea of 13...fxe6 14 Qd6!, but 13...dxe6 14 Qe2 Qb6 seems fairly reasonable for Black whose bishop-pair and pressure against b2 offset his inferior structure) 13...Nc7 (completing the plan to undermine d5 which was begun back on move 4; quite why so many play-



ers have employed 8...gxf6 and not followed suit is another mystery!) 14 d6?! (this is probably too ambitious as the pawn is soon surrounded) 14...Ne8! 15 Na4 (or 15 Rc2 Rb8 16 Rd2 Qa5 and White can't keep everything covered) 15...Rc8 16 Be2 Qa5 17 b3 Bd5 18 Qd2 Qxd2 19 Nxd2 Nxd6 20 Rxc5?! (too hasty; 20 Rfd1 would have offered more chances for survival) 20...Rxc5 21 Nxc5 Rc8 22 Nd3 Rc2 and White was routed by the active black pieces.

### 9 Qxc2

One of the main points behind Simmelink's idea is that White cannot remain material ahead after 9 Bxd8 cxd1Q+ 10 Rxd1 Bxd5: for instance, 11 Neg5! (11 Nfg5? Bxe4 12 Nxe4 Kxd8 leaves Black a pawn up) 11...f6 12 e4 Bxa2! 13 Ra1 Bb3!? 14 Nd2 c4 15 Bxc4 (or 15 Nxb3 cxb3 16 Bc4 Nc6 17 Nxe6 dxe6 18 Bb6 Kf7 19 Be3 Bd6 which can only favour Black) 15...Bxc4 16 Nxc4 Nc6 17 Nxe6 dxe6 18 Bc7 Rc8 19 Nd6+ Bxd6 20 Bxd6 Kf7 resolves itself to equality.

### 9...gxf6 10 Qc3

A key test, forcing Black's dark-squared bishop away from its ideal diagonal. Instead 10 dxe6 fxe6 11 0-0-0! (11 Nfd2 Bxe4 12 Qxe4 Nc6 13 Qh4 h5! 14 e3 Rb8 15 Rb1 f5 gave Black good activity in T.Winkler-J.Simmelink, correspondence 1999) 11...Na6 12 a3 (not ideal, but 12...Nb4 was threatened) 12...Be7 13 e3 Qb6 (Diagram 44) isn't fully clear, but with ...d5 coming I rather like the potential in Black's position.

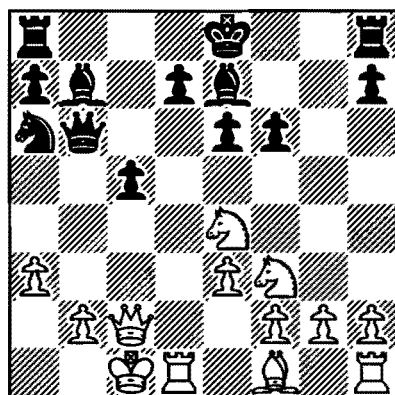


Diagram 44 (W)

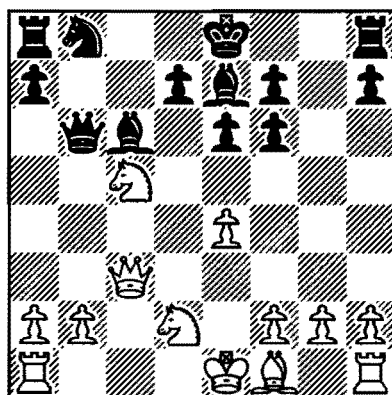


Diagram 45 (W)

It's also worth noting that it's too late for 10 d6?. After 10...Bxe4 11 Qxe4 Qa5+ 12 Nd2 Nc6, the d6-pawn is rather weak and Black very active on the queenside.

### 10...Be7 11 Nxc5 Bxd5 12 e4 Bc6 13 Nd2 Qb6 (Diagram 45)

We've been following B.Lanin-J.Simmelink, correspondence 2001, in which Black

had emerged from the opening with a reasonable position: he is only temporarily cramped and there is counterplay against the b2-, e4- and g2-pawns. Play might continue 14 Rc1 (14 Ncb3?! d5 15 Bd3 Rg8 16 0-0 f5! seized the initiative in the game) 14...Rg8 15 f3 d5 (15...Bxc5!? 16 Qxc5 Qxb2 17 Rb1 Qe5 is the alternative, and after 18 Qxe5 fxe5 19 Nc4 f6 20 Kf2 White should have about enough compensation for the pawn) 16 exd5 Bxd5 with at least equality for Black, since 17...f5 is next up and 17 Nde4 well met by 17...Bxe4! 18 fxe4 Rg4.

## Conclusion

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One has to be happy to handle long-term compensation to employ the Pseudo-Blumenfeld Gambit, but after 5 dxe6 fxe6 6 Nxb5 d5 I believe that Black's strong centre, allied to his usually landing up with somewhat the superior piece activity, does supply good compensation for the pawn, especially should White proceed slowly with 7 e3. More active and ambitious are both 7 c4 and 7 e4, but White is still to prove an advantage with either.

White's most common choice thus far, albeit only by a small margin, has been to decline the pawn with 5 Bg5. However, Black should be happy with his dynamic counterchances after 5...b4 6 Ne4 Bb7. Furthermore, Simmelink's 7 c4 bxc3 8 Bxf6 c2! just looks like a strong intermezzo and one crying out to be employed much more often!

---

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